

CHINESE MARITIME TRANSFORMATION AND SEA POWER: A NET ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) grand strategy is undergoing a sweeping reorientation toward maritime power. Its leaders have declared becoming a “maritime great power” a vital objective. Its naval modernization has produced the largest navy in the world, and its investments in ostensibly civilian assets such as foreign ports and sensors able to track ship movements proliferate across the Indo-Pacific region. To what end? Prior efforts to explain the CCP’s bid for sea power and assess the threat it poses to the United States tend to extrapolate CCP intentions from observed capabilities. These explanations do not align with the CCP’s stated intentions and have not been predictive of its current fleets. This thesis uses a net assessment approach to align CCP capabilities with its intent over a span of decades to arrive at a different characterization of the threat CCP maritime transformation poses to U.S. interests. It finds that the CCP has been engaged in unannounced strategic competition with the United States since before the turn of the century, and its object in this competition is to displace U.S.-led security architecture in pursuit of national rejuvenation. The accumulation and exertion of sea power plays a critical role in strategies to meet this objective; as a result, the CCP has undertaken significant efforts to accumulate and exert sea power to great effect against the United States. Continentalist interests in the CCP bureaucracy have imposed necessary modifications to how the CCP’s sea power manifests, giving rise to potential vulnerabilities in how the CCP builds and uses sea power.

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Acronyms

ADIZ	air defense identification zone
ASBM	anti-ship ballistic missile
ASCM	anti-ship cruise missile
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCG	China Coast Guard
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures
CMC	Central Military Commission
DMO	Distributed Maritime Operations
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DRC	State Council Development Research Center
DSR	Defense Strategy Review
DWP	defense white paper
EEZ	exclusive economic zone
FON	Freedom of Navigation
FONOP	freedom of navigation operation
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IPCSA	International Port Community Systems Association
ISR	intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance
LCS	littoral combat ship
LRASM	long-range anti-ship missile
MLRS	multiple launch rocket system
MSG	military strategic guidance
MSRI	Maritime Silk Road Initiative
NSC	National Security Council
ONA	Office of Net Assessment
PAFMM	People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia
PAP	People's Armed Police
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PLAGF	People's Liberation Army Ground Forces
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PLARF	People's Liberation Army Rocket Force
PRC	People's Republic of China
RMA	revolution in military affairs
SAM	surface-to-air missile
SLOC	sea line of communication
SOE	state-owned enterprise
SSF	Strategic Support Force
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
USG	United States government
VLS	vertical launch system

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I. Executive Summary

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) describes itself as the main stabilizing force and power source of the world economy. From that status, it is attempting to lead what it argues is a necessary reshaping of interstate relations with a new model that displaces U.S. influence and elevates the CCP toward its objective of national rejuvenation. The frictions over whether U.S. influence will be displaced or maintained constitutes strategic competition between the CCP and the United States government (USG). CCP leaders further believe that accruing and exerting sea power is a prerequisite to national rejuvenation, and since 2012 the CCP has undertaken a sweeping maritime transformation reorienting its grand strategy from its continentalist roots to include a maritime vision.

This thesis adopts the net assessment approach to characterize the threat CCP maritime transformation poses to U.S. interests and how that threat is likely to develop over a long-running competition. The net assessment approach rejects efforts to derive an actor's intent from the capabilities it develops on the grounds that doing so risks mistaking transient developments for the enduring nature of a competition. In a strategic competition, making such mistakes can lead to crippling delays in policy responses. Given that reshaping a military force in response to a changing threat takes years to decades, such delays may close windows of opportunity once available to the USG and instead open opportunities for the CCP. To accurately assess threat in context of strategic competition, a broad analytical framework is needed.

The CCP has historically been a continental power, and its current maritime transformation faces continuing bureaucratic opposition from continentalist interests. Not least of these is the People's Liberation Army Ground Force (PLAGF), still the dominant service in the CCP's military. The CCP's maritime transformation can be identified by an inter-domain land-sea integrated approach made necessary by those continental interests. With this approach, the CCP has developed a robust sea denial capability within the First and Second Island Chains

and part of the Indian Ocean Region. However, the CCP does not yet have a sophisticated capability to gain and exploit sea control for useful periods in a kinetic conflict, and the PLAGF's persistent influence threatens the PLA Navy's ability to develop one.

The CCP has also exerted its sea power through ostensibly civilian assets with dual-use purposes. A maritime militia comprised of fishing vessels, concerted investments from Chinese state-owned enterprises targeting strategically-located deep water ports, and maritime research satellites with ship tracking capabilities all mobilize civilian assets—in China and other countries—to advance the CCP's military power. These civilian investments augment the CCP's ongoing military modernization to cut into the U.S. military's margin of military superiority, calling into question the credibility of U.S. security guarantees and thus stressing the U.S.-led security architecture in the Indo-Pacific.

The following findings emerge from this assessment:

1. There is no future in which CCP maritime transformation poses a low threat to U.S. interests.
2. PRC economic growth determines the intensity of maritime transformation, but it is not the object of such.
3. Sea control in the Indo-Pacific is on track to become prohibitively costly.
4. The CCP's vision of sea power is one that is deeply integrated across domains and elements of national power, military and civilian.
5. The USG's focus on high-end threats takes a narrow view of the maritime competition's decisive terrain and does not adequately account for the peacetime implications of the CCP's military and paramilitary power.
6. Converting power into strategic influence remains a weakness for the CCP.
7. The PLA Ground Force's continentalism remains an enduring vulnerability for CCP sea power.

II. Introduction

Chinese Communist Party (CCP)¹ grand strategy² is undergoing a sweeping reorientation toward the sea. Once a continental power that considered China's long land borders its preponderant international security concern, the CCP has demonstrated remarkable consistency in building commercial maritime and naval power. In 2020, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) declared the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy (PLAN) and the China Coast Guard (CCG) the "largest navy in the world,"³ and "by far the largest coast guard force in the world," respectively.⁴ These fleets are not simply numerous. The PLAN and CCG have well-armed, cruiser-sized warships⁵ that the services misleadingly term "destroyers" and "cutters," respectively.⁶ In 2020, the PLAN launched its first such destroyer, the lead Type 055, which

¹ Throughout, this thesis refers to the People's Republic of China (PRC) when discussing China's state apparatus and the CCP when discussing political leadership. The term "China" where used refers to the geographic landmass and its inhabitants.

² This thesis uses Hal Brands' definition of grand strategy: "a purposeful and coherent set of ideas about what a nation seeks to accomplish in the world, and how it should go about doing so." See Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 3. The topic of grand strategy is discussed further in the section "CCP Grand Strategy: Resolving Contradictions Toward National Rejuvenation."

³ The Department's announcement lagged reality: by hull count, the PLAN won this title in 2016, when analysts determined it had 303 naval vessels while the U.S. Navy was reporting a total battle force of 275 ships. See Andrew S. Erickson, "Understanding China's Third Sea Force: The Maritime Militia," *Fairbank Center Blog*, September 8, 2017, <https://medium.com/fairbank-center/understanding-chinas-third-sea-force-the-maritime-militia-228a2bfbbedd>; Andrew S. Erickson, "Exhibit 0-2. China's Primary Naval Order of Battle (Major Combatants), 1985-2030," in *Chinese Naval Shipbuilding: An Ambitious and Uncertain Course*, ed. Andrew S. Erickson, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2016), XVI; Naval History and Heritage Command, "US Ship Force Levels," U.S. Navy, November 17, 2017, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html#2000>.

⁴ U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020*, U.S. Department of Defense, September 1, 2020, viii & 71, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

⁵ Modern definitions for destroyers and cruisers—a class of naval combatant typically larger and more capable than destroyers but smaller than aircraft carriers and battleships—have been inconsistent. The 1930 London Naval Treaty set destroyer displacement at 1,850 tons, with larger ships classified as cruisers up until 10,000 tons, at which point it was classified under the 1923 Washington Naval Treaty as a capital ship, e.g., battleship. The London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies currently classifies cruisers as warships displacing over 9,750 tons and destroyers as warships displacing between 4,500–9,749 tons. China's Type 055 warship is expected to displace approximately 14,000 tons, and the U.S. Department of Defense classifies it as a cruiser. Nonetheless, the PLA classifies the Type 055 as a destroyer, following precedent set by the U.S. Navy's 14,000-ton Zumwalt destroyers, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force's 24,000-ton Izumo-class helicopter destroyers, and the Republic of Korea Navy's 11,000-ton Sejong the Great-class destroyers. See Keith Patton, "That's a destroyer?" *The Navalist*, April 10, 2017, <https://thenavalist.com/home/2017/4/10/thats-a-destroyer>.

⁶ *Xinhua*, "China's first Type 055 destroyer Nanchang commissioned," January 12, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-01/12/c_138698289.htm; Kyle Mizokami, "China Launches Another Monster Coast Guard Cutter," *Popular Mechanics*, January 14, 2016, <https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/navy-ships/a18990/china-launches-second-monster-coast-guard-cutter/>.

features stealth capabilities and armaments exceeding those of the U.S. Navy's *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyers.⁷

PRC maritime development extends beyond naval and paranaul activities. Since 2016, Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have proliferated ostensibly civilian but inherently dual-use sensors that improve Chinese maritime domain awareness in China's maritime periphery.⁸ Since 2013, other Chinese SOEs have committed strategic investments in global maritime shipping infrastructure, seizing on potentially dual-use infrastructure in waters further from China's shores.⁹ An expansive fleet of survey vessels operated by the PRC and its research institutions suggests CCP ambitions for undersea capabilities as far-reaching as Chinese maritime commerce.¹⁰

To what end? Like that of any other governing regime, the CCP's pursuit of maritime power is a political choice, and one that affects the United States.¹¹ Fleet building is necessarily an "interactive enterprise"; states build the fleets they believe they need to secure—or seize—their interests in the teeth of their adversaries.¹² Whether and what sort of threat the CCP's fleets pose to the United States government (USG) depends on PLAN capabilities as well as

⁷ Daniel Caldwell, Joseph Freda, and Lyle J. Goldstein, "China Maritime Report No. 5: China's Dreadnought? The PLA Navy's Type 055 Cruiser and Its Implications for the Future Maritime Security Environment," *China Maritime Studies Institute*, February 2020, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/5>.

⁸ J. Michael Dahm, "Exploring China's Unmanned Ocean Network," *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, June 16, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/exploring-chinas-unmanned-ocean-network/>; J. Michael Dahm, "China's 'Ocean E-Stations' Deployed to the South China Sea," *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, December 10, 2018, <https://amti.csis.org/chinese-ocean-e-stations-deployed-south-china-sea/>.

⁹ Isaac B. Kardon, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on China's Military Power Projection and U.S. National Interests, February 20, 2020, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Kardon_Revised%20Written%20Testimony_Feb2020.pdf; *The Economist*, "China is making substantial investment in ports and pipelines worldwide," February 6, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2020/02/06/china-is-making-substantial-investment-in-ports-and-pipelines-worldwide>.

¹⁰ *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, "A Survey of Marine Research Vessels in the Indo-Pacific," April 16, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/a-survey-of-marine-research-vessels-in-the-indo-pacific/>; Ryan D. Martinson and Peter A. Dutton, "China Maritime Report No. 3: China's Distant Ocean Survey Activities: Implications for U.S. National Security," *China Maritime Studies Institute*, November 2018, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/3>.

¹¹ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, (1890; reprint, New York: Dover, 1987), 82.

¹² Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy 2nd ed.*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 144-145.

CCP intentions.¹³ Recent indicators of PLAN force employment suggest those intentions are bellicose: in 2018, a PLAN destroyer's aggressive maneuvers nearly forced a collision with a U.S. Navy destroyer, and in 2020, another PLAN destroyer lased a U.S. Navy maritime patrol aircraft, threatening harm to the aircraft's systems and crew, over international waters.¹⁴ Still, the contours of CCP maritime strategy remain to be defined.

The question is complicated by a puzzle: why have regional states begun vocally aligning themselves against the CCP's maritime posture *now*? Traditional balance of power theory approaches to international relations suggest that a state might improve its own military capabilities or seek security assurances in a coalition of allies balancing against a neighbor's growing power.¹⁵ Seeing that East Asian states did not join such a coalition in response to growing PLA capabilities in the past two decades, balance of power theorists further elaborated that the "stopping power of water" reduces threats conveyed or perceived where states do not share a border, and as such, maritime East Asia is "defense dominant," with most states in the region content to let the United States manage regional security issues without the aid of a balancing coalition.¹⁶ However, states on China's maritime periphery have begun taking steps toward this balancing coalition. Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines have all begun or accelerated naval modernization efforts in response to the CCP's maritime posture.¹⁷ Further, in

¹³ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, (1966 reprint, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 36.

¹⁴ *U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs*, "People's Liberation Army Navy lased a U.S. Navy P-8A in unsafe, unprofessional manner," February 27, 2020, <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/news.aspx/110928>; Steven Lee Myers, "American and Chinese Warships Narrowly Avoid High-Seas Collision," *New York Times*, October 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/02/world/asia/china-us-warships-south-china-sea.html>.

¹⁵ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

¹⁶ On the stopping power of water, see John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 114-125. On balancing against maritime power, see Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, "Balancing on Land and at Sea: Do States Ally against the Leading Global Power?" *International Security* 35, no. 1 (Summer 2010), 7-43, https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/ISEC_a_00001. On the stopping power of water precluding a balancing coalition in East Asia, see Øystein Tunsjø, "Global Power Shift, Geography, and Maritime East Asia," in *International Order at Sea: How it is challenged How it is maintained*, eds. Jo Inge Bekkevold and Geoffrey Till, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 41-58; Jennifer Lind, "Geography and the Security Dilemma in Asia," in *The Oxford Handbook of the International Relations of Asia*, eds. Saadia Pekkanen, John Ravenhill, and Rosemary Foot, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 725-726.

¹⁷ *One News*, "Navy Plans 50-Ship Maritime Force To Strengthen Claims On Disputed Seas; BRP Jose Rizal Arrives," May 25, 2020, <https://www.onenews.ph/navy-plans-50-ship-maritime-force-to-strengthen-claims-on->

2020 several states in and beyond Southeast Asia for the first time began coalescing around a 2016 international tribunal ruling that deemed illegal much of the PRC's actions and claims in the South China Sea.¹⁸ Decades into PLAN modernization, a balancing coalition has begun to form. Traditional theories and approaches to analyzing CCP sea power have not provided an accurate threat assessment, and a new approach is needed.

Research Question and Hypothesis

This thesis has two aims: 1) to understand the strategic logic and political drivers of the CCP's approach to building maritime power and 2) to assess this process as a dimension of USG-CCP strategic competition, including its impact on U.S. allies and partners. To meet the former objective, this thesis investigates CCP strategic planning and PRC foreign policymaking processes. To meet the latter objective, this thesis draws on balance of power theory at its intersection with sea power theory in order to investigate the extent to which recent PRC maritime developments bolster CCP strategic influence counterposed to the United States.

This thesis approaches its research questions through the lens of maritime transformation, defined as the reorientation of a regime's grand strategy from a continentalist vision to a maritime vision.¹⁹ To that end, this thesis poses the following research question: what is the driver of CCP maritime transformation, and what sort of threat does it pose to the United States? To answer this question, this thesis uses the net assessment approach to examine CCP intentions for maritime transformation and any proclivities with which the policy of maritime transformation is implemented.

disputed-seas-brp-jose-rizal-arrives; Ralph Jennings, "As China Looms, Vietnam Aims to Develop a More Modern, Skilled Navy," *Voice of America*, August 12, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/china-looms-vietnam-aims-develop-more-modern-skilled-navy>; *Nikkei*, "Japan to convert helicopter carrier Izumo into aircraft carrier," December 11, 2018, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Japan-to-convert-helicopter-carrier-Izumo-into-aircraft-carrier>.

¹⁸ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020, 360-361, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/2020_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf.

¹⁹ Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle J. Goldstein, "Chinese Perspectives on Maritime Transformation," in *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), XIV.

I hypothesize that CCP maritime transformation indicates a CCP objective to advance its strategic influence in a zero-sum competition against the United States by building Mahanian sea power;²⁰ however, while the CCP effectively secures public Chinese support for this objective, ossified continentalist interests distort CCP maritime strategic planning and hinder implementation at the bureaucratic level, collectively posing an enduring challenge for maritime competition against the United States. This hypothesis addresses CCP intent as well as PRC and PLA capabilities. Thomas Schelling observed that “it is a tradition in military planning to attend to an enemy’s capabilities, not his intentions.”²¹ This thesis attempts both.

Previous Scholarship on Chinese Maritime Transformation

The topic of PRC maritime transformation has a robust but fragmented literature. Chinese policy documents do not discuss a cohesive maritime strategy. In fact, the term rarely arises in CCP official statements or strategy documents.²² While this may indicate compartmentalization in planning and implementing PRC maritime transformation, what is certain is that much of the analytical literature reflects this same compartmentalization by focusing largely on PRC, especially PLA, maritime capabilities, with much less attention given to CCP strategic intentions.²³ A common approach in the literature is to adopt a structural realist view of domestic politics as black boxes, with instruments of power as the key measurable variable. Following this approach, much of the literature defines CCP intentions in terms of threat perceptions and the military capabilities which respond to them. Leading existing

²⁰ Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) was an officer in the U.S. Navy whose publications on sea power remain highly influential in maritime strategy. A definition and detailed discussion of Mahanian sea power is given on pages 39-41.

²¹ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, (1966 reprint, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 35.

²² Ryan D. Martinson, “Panning for Gold: Assessing Chinese Maritime Strategy from Primary Sources,” *Naval War College Review* 69, no. 3 (Summer 2016), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol69/iss3/4>.

²³ One marked exception is the 2009 edited volume by Andrew Erickson, Lyle Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, which takes a comparative approach to understanding PRC maritime transformation which explicitly considers the development of Chinese maritime capabilities alongside its domestic dialectic on choosing sea power. See Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, eds., *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009).

explanations for PRC maritime transformation which consider both intention and capability fall into three broad categories: 1) naval nationalism, 2) responding to shifts in geopolitical threat, and 3) survival.

Naval Nationalism

One interpretation of PRC maritime development is that it is not maritime transformation at all. PRC maritime development could be explained as one component of a prestige strategy, in which the CCP remains a continental regime with an invariably continentalist vision but faces rising domestic pressures to build a navy. Under this framework, the CCP builds capital ships to appeal to the national impulses of Chinese citizens without committing to maritime competition with the United States. Robert Ross calls this approach “naval nationalism.”²⁴

According to naval nationalism, the CCP faces outsized continental threats along its land borders and an insurmountable maritime obstacle in the U.S. Navy. As such, it eschews direct naval competition with the United States and instead invests in a small number of high-profile warships, including aircraft carriers. This “prestige fleet” feeds popular support among Chinese citizens for a prestigious navy and offers some minor capabilities to complicate U.S. naval operations near China’s shores without incurring the prohibitive defense spending and opportunity cost to border security that would be required of a genuine naval buildup. PLAN expert Bernard Cole, elaborating on Ross’s explanation, offers that the CCP does not attempt to surpass or supplant the United States but nonetheless invests in its prestige fleet in an effort to “reestablish its country and culture as central to the region and possibly to the world.”²⁵

²⁴ This section largely follows the argument laid out in Robert S. Ross, “China’s Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects, and the U.S. Response,” *International Security* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2009), 46-81, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2009.34.2.46>; and Robert S. Ross, “Nationalism, Geopolitics, and Naval Expansionism From the Nineteenth Century to the Rise of China,” *Naval War College Review* 71, no. 4 (2018), 11-45, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol71/iss4/4>.

²⁵ Bernard D. Cole, *China’s Quest for Great Power: Ships, Oil, and Foreign Policy*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2016), 6. Also see Bernard D. Cole, *Asian Maritime Strategies: Navigating Troubled Waters*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2013), 112-113.

The PRC remains a land power by necessity of its geopolitical status: China's greatest security threats remain on its extensive land borders, which it shares with 14 countries including Afghanistan, India, North Korea, Russia, and Pakistan. These continental threats are exacerbated by domestic instability threatening China's territorial integrity in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia. PLA force structure reflects this threat assessment: despite repeated personnel cuts, the PLA Ground Force's (PLAGF) nearly 1 million active duty servicemen makes up approximately half of the active duty personnel in the entire PLA.²⁶ Further, PLAGF officers continue to dominate operational leadership, leading three of the PLA's five theater commands.²⁷ The PLAGF is supplemented by yet another million personnel in the paramilitary People's Armed Police (PAP), who fulfill a primary mission of maintaining domestic stability under CCP rule.²⁸ By comparison, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) estimates the PLAN has only 250,000 active duty personnel.²⁹ These continental threat perceptions and army building tendencies represent the latest iteration of Imperial China's long history of a continentalist strategic culture.³⁰ Moreover, the gap between the U.S. Navy and the PLAN in force structure, technological sophistication, and seamanship is also prohibitive of any serious CCP consideration for maritime competition against the United States. In fact, CCP leaders understand that investment in blue water naval capabilities would invite competition with the United States, ultimately undermining rather than bolstering CCP security. As such, the

²⁶ Marcus Clay and Dennis Blasko, "People Win Wars: The PLA Enlisted Force, and Other Related Matters," *War on the Rocks*, July 31, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/07/people-win-wars-the-pla-enlisted-force-and-other-related-matters/>; U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win*, January 3, 2019, 55, https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/China_Military_Power_FINAL_5MB_20190103.pdf.

²⁷ Dennis J. Blasko, "The Biggest Loser in Chinese Military Reforms," in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders et al., (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 351-353.

²⁸ Joel Wuthnow, *China's Other Army: The People's Armed Police in an Era of Reform*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 4, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/82/China%20SP%2014%20Final%20for%20Web.pdf>.

²⁹ International Institute for Strategic Studies, "2020 Chapter Six: Asia," in *The Military Balance* 120, no. 1 (2020), 261, <https://doi.org/10.1080/04597222.2020.1707967>.

³⁰ John Curtis Perry, "Imperial China and the Sea," in *Asia Looks Seaward: Power and Maritime Strategy*, eds. Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2008), 17-31.

CCP's security calculus remains overwhelmingly and enduringly focused on continental threats, and any increase in maritime focus for PLA strategic planning or resource allocation must come on the margins of continental considerations.

Despite the absence of clear national defense reasoning and prohibitive technology limitations, the Chinese public grew increasingly interested in a Chinese aircraft carrier.³¹ As Ross rationalizes, "aircraft carriers are a symbol of great-power status, so realization of the China dream required China to develop a fleet of them."³² Ross further demonstrates the link between Chinese public nationalism and PLAN force structure by pointing out that public support in the PRC for building an aircraft carrier emerged in the early 2000s.³³ Beginning then and continuing thereafter, civilian CCP and PLA officials began publicly endorsing the notion of a Chinese aircraft carrier for reasons of national pride, most prominently when PRC Minister for National Defense Liang Guanglie [梁光烈] reportedly said in a 2009 visit to his Japanese counterpart, "among the big nations, only China does not have an aircraft carrier. China cannot be without an aircraft carrier forever."³⁴ Accordingly, PLAN force development is shaped by the CCP's decades-long pursuit of a highly specific form of naval power: one supplementary to border security and which rode a swell of public demand for capital ships.

Following the framework of naval nationalism, CCP maritime development, merely the strategically unimportant outgrowth of a continental power, poses a decidedly manageable threat to U.S. interests. The CCP maritime objective is to bolster its domestic support by feeding Chinese public nationalism through the visible launch and operation of capital ships.

³¹ On the limits of Chinese technology and shipbuilding infrastructure necessary for building and maintaining a Chinese aircraft carrier, see Andrew S. Erickson and Andrew R. Wilson, "China's Aircraft Carrier Dilemma," *Naval War College Review* 59, no. 4 (2006), 13-45, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol59/iss4/4>.

³² Robert S. Ross, "Nationalism, Geopolitics, and Naval Expansionism From the Nineteenth Century to the Rise of China," *Naval War College Review* 71, no. 4 (2018), 32, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol71/iss4/4>.

³³ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁴ Agence France-Presse, "China confirms intent to build aircraft carrier: reports," March 23, 2009, https://www.terraviva.com/reports/China_confirms_intent_to_build_aircraft_carrier_reports_999.html, Nan Li and Christopher Weuve, "China's Aircraft Carrier Ambitions," *Naval War College Review* 63, no. 1 (2010), 13-32, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol63/iss1/3>.

Accordingly, the purpose of any Chinese aircraft carriers or large warships is to show the flag and contribute to fervent propaganda narratives of the CCP championing Chinese interests and restoring national pride. While this objective may pose some risks as warships from the U.S. military and PLA operate in proximity to one another, as well as insofar as nationalism also shapes how these warships will be used, PLAN capital ships are not designed to address a perceived maritime threat, and as such, U.S. security interests are untargeted and largely unthreatened.

Shifting Geopolitical Threat

A second explanation for CCP maritime transformation could be that CCP leaders observed a geopolitical shift in the CCP's threats and interests. Michael Glosny and Phillip Saunders cogently argue that "as continental pressures on China have diminished, strategic pressures from the sea have become more salient," so driving the CCP's investment into its navy.³⁵

China's long land border with Russia was an overwhelming security concern for PLA planners following the Sino-Soviet split in 1960. However, the record of PLA military strategic guidelines (MSGs), which are the irregularly-issued but authoritative documents which detail the PLA's strategic opponent and associated war planning concepts, reveal a decisive shift away from concern over China's land borders. Every MSG promulgated between 1964 and 1980 identified the Soviet Union as the CCP's primary strategic opponent and further identified that the center of gravity for PLA defense planning was to China's north.³⁶ These perceptions began

³⁵ Michael A. Glosny and Phillip C. Saunders, "Debating China's Naval Nationalism," *International Security* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2010), 161-175, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_c_00021. Similar arguments are made in Paul H.B. Godwin, "Change and Continuity in Chinese Military Doctrine: 1949–1999," in *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience Since 1949*, eds. Mark A. Ryan, David M. Finkelstein, and Michael A. McDevitt, (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 23-55; and Michael McDevitt, "The Strategic and Operational Context Driving PLA Navy Building," in *Right-Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military*, eds. Roy Kamphausen and Andrew Scobell, (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), 481-522.

³⁶ David M. Finkelstein, "China's Military Strategy: An Overview of the 'Military Strategic Guidelines'," in *Right-Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military*, eds. Roy Kamphausen and Andrew Scobell, (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), 93; M. Taylor Fravel, "Shifts in Warfare and Party Unity: Explaining

to shift in the early 1980s. For several months in 1985, the PLA's Central Military Commission (CMC), its highest decision making body, and Chinese paramount leader Deng Xiaoping met to assess the strategic situation and revise PLA strategy accordingly. On June 6, 1985, Deng authoritatively declared, "we have changed our view that the danger of war is imminent," a judgment that the CCP's security challenges, primarily threats along China's northern border, were unlikely to include total war.³⁷ Following this declaration of the CCP's revised threat perception, the PLA recalibrated its attentions. Liberated from single-minded preparation to repel a Soviet overland invasion, the PLA was charged in 1988 to reorient toward local wars on China's coast, including toward ongoing sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea.³⁸

At the same time China's continental threats receded, its economic maritime interests grew. In 1979, Deng identified four "special economic zones," (SEZs) wherein both taxes and certain restrictions of China's planned economy were relaxed, to be established along China's coast: Shenzhen, Shantou, Zhuhai near Hong Kong, and Xiamen, across the Strait from Taiwan.³⁹ These SEZs lowered the cost of production and increased the amount of capital flowing into the PRC, financing China's early industrialization and eventually growing to become regional and global hubs of investment that drove remarkable economic growth in China for over three decades.⁴⁰ As of 2017, the activity through only three clusters of port systems accounted for approximately 36 percent of China's gross domestic product (GDP).⁴¹

China's Changes in Military Strategy," *International Security* 42, no. 3, (Winter 2017/18), 37-83, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00304.

³⁷ M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 174-176.

³⁸ Ibid, 179.

³⁹ Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 67.

⁴⁰ Chen Xiangming, "Change and continuity in special economic zones: a reassessment and lessons from China.," *Transnational Corporations* 26, is. 2, (2019), 49-74, <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1240&context=facpub>; Douglas Zhihua Zeng, "How Do Special Economic Zones and Industrial Clusters Drive China's Rapid Development?," in *Building Engines for Growth and Competitiveness in China: Experience with Special Economic Zones and Industrial Clusters*, ed. Douglas Zhihua Zeng, (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2010), 1-54, <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-8432-9>.

⁴¹ These three clusters are the Pearl River Delta, the Yangtze River Delta, and the Bohai Economic Rim. See Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy 2nd ed.*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 53-61.

Receding continental threats and growing maritime economic interests drove Chinese naval investment. Recognizing that the PRC has growing overseas interests, then-CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao issued the “New Historic Missions,” in 2004, charging the PLA with a slate of new missions, including safeguarding PRC economic interests along sea lines of communication (SLOCs), which Hu described as “a strategic resource treasure-house for the sustainable development of humanity.”⁴² Changes to PLA force planning reaffirmed these new missions. In 2006, the PRC released a Defense White Paper (DWP), a document released approximately every two years detailing PLA perceptions and reforms, announcing that the PLA will transition from focusing on territorial defense to instead focus on offshore defense operations by investing in the PLAN’s and PLA Air Force’s (PLAAF) strategic depth.⁴³ All subsequent DWPs have echoed this call for strategic depth as well as for additional investment in naval and air capabilities. In this context, strategic depth is constabulary, not expeditionary. PLA force structure adhered to force planning: PLAN and PLAAF projected force structure for the next decade strongly suggests focus on protecting overseas investments, not operating in contested environments.⁴⁴

Following the geopolitical framework, PRC maritime transformation is not a concerted, long-term competitive strategy but rather a recent response to two shifts in CCP perceptions: 1) diminishing threats along China’s land border, and 2) increasing economic interests along

⁴² Quoted in Daniel M. Hartnett, “The ‘New Historic Missions’: Reflections on Hu Jintao’s Military Legacy,” in *Assessing the People’s Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era*, eds. Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Travis Tanner, (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2014), 49-52.

⁴³ PRC State Council Information Office, *China’s National Defense in 2006*, December 2006, <http://en.people.cn/whitepaper/defense2006/defense2006.html>. Strategic depth refers to buffer distance between an adversary or conflict theater and the domestic centers of political, economic, and civil interest. The PLA refers to this as “strategic space” [战略空间] beyond China’s borders within which the PLA can resist foreign intervention and aggression. The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* advocates “forward defense” [前沿防卫] in which “China’s borders and coasts are now viewed as interior lines of a conflict, not exterior ones.” For more on this, see M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Changing Approach to Military Strategy: The Science of Military Strategy from 2001 and 2013,” in *China’s Evolving Military Strategy*, ed. Joe McReynolds, (Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2017), 55-60.

⁴⁴ Chad Peltier, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on China’s Military Power Projection and U.S. National Interests, February 20, 2020, 4-5, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Peltier_Written%20Testimony.pdf.

SLOCs to be protected. The PRC is undergoing a maritime transformation only insofar as it reflects the CCP's efforts to minimize threat and maximize economic gain. While PLAN investments are clearly intended to secure Chinese commercial shipping and not to wage a high-end kinetic war against the U.S. Navy, the probability of accidental escalation increases with PLAN capabilities, as PLAN escorts continue further along their SLOCs, and as the U.S. and PLA navies operate in closer proximity to one another. Moreover, the CCP's interest in operating its own navy suggests a disinterest in relying on the U.S. Navy to secure its SLOCs, suggesting potential CCP suspicion or distrust of the United States military, which can contribute to risky military interactions. Nonetheless, the United States is not the CCP's designated adversary, and any PLAN capabilities built up are intended for escort, not warfighting. So long as the United States and the CCP foster robust mil-mil communication mechanisms and have de-escalation procedures in place to manage any friction that arises as the CCP builds its naval capabilities, the United States enjoys minimal threat from the CCP's benign, economically-minded intentions.

Survival

A third explanation for CCP maritime transformation is that the CCP faces existential threat from historically imperial powers and must build a defensive naval capacity to deny these countries' attempts to impinge upon the PRC's rejuvenation as a great power. This interpretation, pervasive in current research from Chinese analysts, is particularly common in PLA literature and has been explored at length by Lt. Colonel Dr. Shi Xiaoqin [师小芹] and Senior Colonel Wu Xiaoyan [吴晓燕]. Both researchers are also members of the PLA Academy of Military Science, a top-level PLA research institute which reports directly to the CMC, suggesting these perspectives are part of the discussion among top PLA decision-makers. This explanation is not a strictly military perspective. It is shared by civilian academics participating in state-affiliated think tanks such as Ju Hailong [鞠海龙], a researcher supporting the Academy of

Ocean of China [中国海洋发展研究中心] and the China Association of Marine Affairs [中国海洋发展研究会].⁴⁵

According to this explanation, any assessment of the drivers behind PRC maritime transformation must begin with China's historic military defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), which was a critical turning point in the Qing Dynasty's colonization by other countries. As Col. Wu explains, "without a strong maritime defense and a well-trained navy, China lost the wars in resisting foreign aggressors."⁴⁶ Similarly, the PLAN's top officer and top commissar claimed that inadequate naval power during that period left China helpless against imperialist forces, which proceeded to invade China over 470 times and force the ruling Qing dynasty into signing extractive and nationally humiliating treaties.⁴⁷ External imperialism remains a persistent threat. Western sea powers, such as the United States and United Kingdom, and their acolytes such Japan, continue to prosecute strategies aligned with Alfred Thayer Mahan's approach to sea power, which takes as its foundation the imperialist idea that a state must either expand or collapse and, as such, makes an interstate conflict an inevitability.⁴⁸ In this reading of Mahanian sea power, states leverage offensive maritime strategies in zero-sum competitions to maximize their own interests. Upon reaching an unspecified critical point, this competition for sea power becomes one for "sea hegemony."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Both of these institutions are affiliated with state agencies. The Academy of Ocean of China is a think tank under the joint leadership of the PRC's State Oceanic Administration and Ministry of Education, while the China Association of Marine Affairs is jointly managed by the State Oceanic Administration, the Ministry of Land and Resources, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs. See *Academy of Ocean of China* [中国海洋发展研究中心], "Center Overview" [中心概况], <http://aoc.ouc.edu.cn/9807/list.htm>; Sun Shuqing, "Inaugural Meeting of the Marine Strategic Planning and Economic Research division of the China Association of Marine Affairs and the forum on 'Community of Common Marine Destiny and Becoming a Maritime Great Power' is held in Tianjin" [中国海洋发展研究会海洋战略规划与经济研究分会成立大会 暨“海洋命运共同体与海洋强国建设”高端论坛在津召开], *China Oceanic Information Network* [中国海洋信息网], November 27, 2019, <http://www.nmdis.org.cn/c/2019-11-27/69847.shtml>.

⁴⁶ Wu Xiaoyan, "China's 'Sea Power Nation' Strategy," *Institute for Security & Development Policy*, June 2014, 13, <https://isdpr.eu/content/uploads/publications/2014-wu-chinas-sea-power-nation-strategy.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Shen Jinlong [沈金龙] and Qin Shengxiang [秦生祥], "The People's Navy: Setting Sail and Forging Ahead at 70 Years" [人民海军: 扬帆奋进 70 年], *Qiushi* [求是], April 16, 2019, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2019-04/16/c_1124364140.htm.

⁴⁸ Shi Xiaoqin [师小芹], *Seapower and U.S.-China Relations* [论海权与中美关系], (Beijing: Military Science Press [军事科学出版社], 2012), 56-58.

⁴⁹ Ju Hailong, *China's Maritime Power and Strategy: History, National Security and Geopolitics*, (Beijing: China Social

In this strategic environment, the PRC's maritime transformation is a bid for survival, not domination. China's maritime economy is a critical part of the "grand strategy of China's rise" through peaceful development, and to succeed, the CCP must ensure China's economic development by safeguarding its SLOCs.⁵⁰ Yet the CCP's strategic interests are complicated by China's ethno-nationalist character. The Chinese people are inherently peaceful: CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping declared, "the blood of the Chinese people carries no gene for invading others or proclaiming oneself a global hegemon," and the eunuch Zheng He's peaceful maritime expeditions as early as 1405 demonstrate this peaceful national character has a long history.⁵¹ Moreover, Western countries, like the United States, as well as non-Western countries that would learn from them such as Japan, do have imperialist genes.⁵² The CCP thus faces a tension between China's peaceful national character and the strategic pressures thrust upon the CCP by Western sea powers vying for hegemony.⁵³

Reflecting both influences, Chinese maritime power is built with single-mindedly defensive or "anti-aggressive" intentions.⁵⁴ While China's peaceful national character precludes the CCP from adopting an offensive maritime strategy as those exhibited by Western powers,

Sciences Press, 2015), 24-28.

⁵⁰ Wu Xiaoyan, "China's 'Sea Power Nation' Strategy," *Institute for Security & Development Policy*, June 2014, 14-19, <https://isd.dp.eu/content/uploads/publications/2014-wu-chinas-sea-power-nation-strategy.pdf>; China Internet Information Center [中国网国情中心], "Exclusive: China's Oceanic Rise Walks a New Path of Peaceful Development" [【独家】中国的海洋崛起走和平发展的新路], January 31, 2013, http://opinion.china.com.cn/opinion_23_63923.html;

⁵¹ "Xi Jinping: The Blood of the Chinese People has No Gene for Invasion [习近平：中华民族血液中没有侵略基因]," *Beijing News* [新京报], May 16, 2014, <http://bj.people.com.cn/n/2014/0516/c233086-21216947.html>; Shi Xiaoqin, "An Analysis of China's Concept of Sea Power," *Institute for Security & Development Policy*, December 2011, 8, https://isd.dp.eu/content/uploads/publications/2011_shi_%20analysis-of-china-sea%20power.pdf.

⁵² These ethno-nationalist views are not fringe beliefs in the CCP. Wang Yi is currently the PRC's Foreign Minister. Xie Yun, at the time of the cited publication, was a scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Science's Institute of American Studies. See PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Wang Yi: China Cannot and Will Not Become Another America," [王毅：中国不会也不可能变成另一个美国], July 9, 2020, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjbzhd/t1796292.shtml>; Xie Yun, "Japan's Historic Gene of Refusing to Concede Guilt: Evil Consequences of Westernization" [日本不肯悔罪的历史基因：全盘西化出恶果], *People's Daily Overseas Edition*, August 8, 2014, http://www.mod.gov.cn/opinion/2014-08/08/content_4527806.htm.

⁵³ Ju Hailong, *China's Maritime Power and Strategy: History, National Security and Geopolitics*, (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2015), 32; Shi Xiaoqin, "An Analysis of China's Concept of Sea Power," *Institute for Security & Development Policy*, December 2011, 8, https://isd.dp.eu/content/uploads/publications/2011_shi_%20analysis-of-china-sea%20power.pdf.

⁵⁴ Shi Xiaoqin [师小芹], *Seapower and U.S.-China Relations* [论海权与中美关系], (Beijing: Military Science Press [军事科学出版社], 2012), 217.

the CCP is also decidedly abandoning the naval passivity which enabled China's colonization after the First Sino-Japanese war.⁵⁵ A yawning gap in power between the coalition of sea powers and the PLAN reinforces China's peaceful national character to ensure that the PLAN's development is strictly defensive. PLA strategic guidelines all embody the principle of "active defense," which Taylor Fravel describes as "how to conduct operations when facing a superior enemy, numerically or technologically, and thus when on the strategic defensive."⁵⁶ As such, while Western powers may use a Mahanian lens to mistakenly interpret the CCP's pursuit of maritime power as a potential threat, the Chinese national character anchors Chinese sea power as the strength necessary to deter foreign expansionist interests from obstructing China's rise.⁵⁷

Following the framework of national survival, PRC maritime transformation builds a limited conventional deterrent against the expansionist policies of other countries. While such actions may be threatening when undertaken by countries with imperialist genes, the national survival framework suggests the PRC's maritime ambitions are characterized by China's peaceful national character rather than Mahan's imperial-era strategic logic. Rather than bidding for maritime hegemony, the PRC's maritime transformation is in service to a CCP grand strategy of peaceful development and rising back to great power status. The absence of expansionist CCP intent means that PRC maritime transformation's threat to the United States is entirely nonexistent, regardless of whatever defensive capabilities the PLAN may or may not develop. Under this framework, to avoid conflict between the U.S. Navy and the PLAN, the USG

⁵⁵ Shi Xiaoqin [师小芹], *Seapower and U.S.-China Relations* [论海权与中美关系], (Beijing: Military Science Press [军事科学出版社], 2012), 219; Ju Hailong, *China's Maritime Power and Strategy: History, National Security and Geopolitics*, (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2015), 9-18.

⁵⁶ M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 61.

⁵⁷ Shi Xiaoqin [师小芹], *Seapower and U.S.-China Relations* [论海权与中美关系], (Beijing: Military Science Press [军事科学出版社], 2012), 219-220.

should restrain its own hegemonic ambitions and avoid encroaching on China's peaceful development, as failure to do so will force the PLAN to defend its interests.

Gaps in Explaining PRC Maritime Transformation

Taken separately, each of these three drivers for maritime transformation would have distinct influences on PRC maritime planning, especially PLAN force structure. These characteristics are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Drivers of PRC Maritime Transformation and Resultant Types of PLAN Forces

	CCP intent	PLAN force type	Threat to the United States
Naval nationalism	Appeal to rising domestic nationalism	Prestige fleet of capital ships	Low; prestige fleet has little warfighting capability
Geopolitical shift	Secure economic growth through maritime trade	Constabulary force with growing power projection capabilities	Low-moderate; U.S. and CCP interests are not in conflict, but navies operating in close proximity along SLOCS increases chance of miscalculation
Survival	Deter imperialism	Capable of deterring an expeditionary force near China's shores	Scales to U.S. interests in threatening Chinese sovereignty or territorial integrity

Naval nationalism's driver would produce a prestige fleet with a few, well-publicized capital ships but fewer of the escorting, comparatively less-prestigious supply ships needed to operate a functional carrier strike group. The geopolitical driver would produce a blue water⁵⁸

⁵⁸ While definitions for blue water naval capabilities elude rigid boundaries, blue water navies are typically regarded as being able to conduct sustained operations in waters far from a home country, including the high seas, and without shore-based support. In contrast, green water navies are generally regarded as being able to operate in regional seas with shore-based support, and brown water navies are restricted to littoral zones. See, for example, Geoffrey Till and Patrick Bratton, *Sea Power and the Asia-Pacific: The Triumph of Neptune?*, (London: Routledge, 2012), 150.

but largely constabulary force shaped to deter or defeat pirate elements but unable to effectively engage the U.S. Navy. The survival driver would produce a fleet capable of prevailing in a high-end kinetic conflict against the United States near China's shores but may not include expeditionary capabilities. In reality, all of these drivers likely explain aspects of PLAN force structure and employment, by extension also explaining some aspects of PRC maritime transformation. Reflecting the nationalist influence in PLAN activities, the PLAN continues to produce capital ships to great fanfare, and any development regarding either PLAN aircraft carrier, the currently solitary Type 055 destroyer, and the hospital ship *Peace Ark* feature prominently in official propaganda.⁵⁹ Reflecting the geopolitical driver, the full PLA has been engaged in a decades long turn away from a primarily continental military to a primarily maritime one, and the theme is a recurrent feature in published strategic documents, defense white papers, and service reforms.⁶⁰ And the notion of defensive intentions facing existential threats has been a staple of CCP propaganda regarding the PLA, certainly the PLAN, for decades.⁶¹

Still, no combination of these explanations completely explains PRC maritime transformation. None of these proposed drivers specifically explains the timing or extent of PRC investment in a blue water navy over the last decade. Moreover, with the exception of the semi-regular defense white paper publications, these explanations largely eschew use of top-level CCP strategic documents in determining CCP maritime objectives or threat perceptions. This section overviews gaps in the explanatory and predictive power of each proposed driver.

⁵⁹ See, for example, War is Boring, "Your Health! My Pursuit! China's Hospital Ship Propaganda Posters," *Medium*, July 27, 2014, <https://medium.com/war-is-boring/your-health-my-pursuit-chinas-hospital-ship-propaganda-fca3c39bcb64>.

⁶⁰ Andrew S. Erickson, "China's Defense White Paper Means Only One Thing: Trouble Ahead," *The National Interest*, July 29, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/china%E2%80%99s-defense-white-paper-means-only-one-thing-trouble-ahead-69911>.

⁶¹ See, for example, *Xinhua*, "China Concludes Celebration of Navy Anniversary With Grand Fleet Review," April 24, 2009, http://www.bjreview.com.cn/quotes/txt/2009-04/24/content_192515.htm; Andrew Chubb, "Propaganda, Not Policy: Explaining the PLA's 'Hawkish Faction' (Part One)," *China Brief*, July 25, 2013, <https://jamestown.org/program/propaganda-not-policy-explaining-the-plas-hawkish-faction-part-one/>.

Nationalism and Border Threats?

Naval nationalism is unlikely to explain, or explain away, PRC maritime transformation. The explanation's proposal that PLAN force structure reflects a prestige strategy meant to address growing Chinese nationalism does not accurately reflect military or civilian realities in China.

The narrative that popular nationalism in China is potent enough to shape top-level CCP decisions, such as building a prestige fleet, appears empirically unsubstantiated. Research from Alastair Iain Johnston and, separately, Andrew Chubb using survey data in China find that popular nationalist sentiment in China has not grown or disapproved of PRC policy over the last two decades. Rather, the opposite appears to be the case: Johnston found that "most indicators show a decline in levels of nationalism since around 2009," the same year Ross first published his argument on naval nationalism.⁶² Chubb similarly found Chinese citizens who get their information from traditional media are more likely to favor compromise, suggesting significant PRC ability to manage domestic opinions.⁶³ One analyst commenting on Chubb's research noted that the narrative that CCP decision makers are constrained by Chinese public nationalism appears to be largely promulgated, perhaps fabricated whole cloth, by representatives of PRC state institutions interested in convincing foreign observers of this narrative.⁶⁴

Elite discourse and PLA reform similarly offer an account of CCP threat perception which naval nationalism cannot explain. While domestic propaganda supports the argument that the PLA's prestige matters to the CCP, state media has since 2006 been increasingly critical of the

⁶² Alastair Iain Johnston, "Is Chinese Nationalism Rising? Evidence from Beijing," *International Security* 41, no. 3 (Winter 2016/17), 7-43, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00265.

⁶³ David Denemark and Andrew Chubb, "Citizen attitudes towards China's maritime territorial disputes: traditional media and Internet usage as distinctive conduits of political views in China," *Information, Communication & Society* 19, no. 1 (2016), 59-79, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1093527>.

⁶⁴ Peter Mattis, "China Not Full of Raging Nationalists," *The National Interest*, April 9, 2014, <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/china-not-full-raging-nationalists-10217>.

PLA's actual warfighting capability.⁶⁵ These criticisms, including charges that PLA officers are incapable of accurately assessing a combat situation or making any operational decisions, being published in popular state-run outlets such as the *PLA Daily* or *Xinhua* directly undermines the CCP's ability to benefit from PLA prestige.⁶⁶ Nor does the emphasis on warfighting capability over prestige support Ross's characterization of the PRC as deeply insecure and facing serious threats along its borders. The CCP has openly declared that its external security environment has significantly improved from when it perceived significant overland threats: observing that a Soviet invasion was unlikely, in 1978 Deng Xiaoping declared "peace and development" the "main theme of the era," and every subsequent CCP General Secretary has evaluated and reaffirmed this determination.⁶⁷ Reflecting this assessment, PLA reforms on improving warfighting capability have prioritized strategic depth past China's coast rather than hardened defenses along its land borders. The PLAGF continues to shrink with each reform as the CCP invests in PLAN, PLAAF, and PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) strategic depth.⁶⁸ Naval nationalism predicts a small prestige fleet secondary to PLAGF units securing China's borders. It is not the fleet the PLAN has built.

⁶⁵ For current examples, see *PLA Daily*, "Recognize the Goal: Break from 'Plan Dependence'" [目标识别摆脱“计划依赖症”], April 1, 2020, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2020-04/01/content_257968.htm; *PLA Daily*, "The Blue Team Evaluates the Red Team" [蓝方团队坐上红方战法评估席], April 14, 2020, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2020-04/14/content_258845.htm; *PLA Daily*, "Using Accurate Data to Identify Training Issues" [用翔实数据揭示训练问题], March 1, 2020, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2020-03/01/content_255214.htm.

⁶⁶ Dennis J. Blasko, "PLA Weaknesses and Xi's Concerns about PLA Capabilities," written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on *Backlash from Abroad: The Limits of Beijing's Power to Shape its External Environment*, February 7, 2019, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Blasko_USCC%20Testimony_FINAL.pdf.

⁶⁷ David M. Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders its National Security: "The Great Peace and Development Debate of 1999"*, CNA Memorandum D0014464.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, December 2000); Yang Jiechi, "Advancing China's Major-Country Diplomacy Under the Guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Foreign Affairs," *Qiushi* 11, no. 4, iss. 41, (October-December 2019), http://english.qstheory.cn/2020-01/13/c_1125443556.htm; Wang Yi, "Upholding the Trend of Peace and Development of Our World with Unity, Cooperation, Openness and Inclusiveness," (speech, at the French Institute of International Relations, August 30, 2020), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1810696.shtml.

⁶⁸ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020, 60-62, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/2020_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf.

Securing Maritime Trade?

The explanation of shifting geopolitical pressures is similarly inadequate for PRC maritime transformation. Although this explanation has a more accurate perception of CCP threat perception than naval nationalism, its image of a PRC developing naval capabilities proportionate to its needs to guard its growing interests in maritime trade does not align with the reality of the CCP strategic ambitions and steps the PRC and PLA have taken to realize them.

PLAN force employment in the Western Pacific has been provocative in ways that would undermine a supposed strategy of conflict management in order to ensure PRC economic interests. While SLOC protection has long involved escorts and naval exercises intended to deter potential adversaries, PLAN aggressions against Southeast Asian states and the United States stretch well beyond these missions.⁶⁹ PLA aviators and captains have demonstrated an enduring behavioral pattern of provocatively engaging U.S. assets in the Western Pacific: in 2001, a PLA pilot undertook dangerous maneuvers around a U.S. Navy EP-3 reconnaissance plane flying over the South China Sea, resulting in a collision fatal to the Chinese pilot.⁷⁰ In 2009, Chinese vessels similarly harassed the USNS *Impeccable*, an unarmed surveillance vessel.⁷¹ In 2018, a PLAN destroyer's aggressive maneuvering threatened a collision with a U.S. Navy destroyer.⁷² The PLAN escalated these provocations to new heights in 2020 when a PLAN destroyer lased a U.S. Navy P-8A surveillance aircraft, conducting a directed energy attack threatening damage to the aircraft's systems.⁷³ Nor is the United States the sole target of aggressive Chinese behavior: CCG vessels aggressively patrol the South China Sea, in several

⁶⁹ S. D. Landersman, "Naval Protection of Shipping: A Lost Art?," *Naval War College Review* 39, no. 2, (March-April 1986), 23-34, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44636620>.

⁷⁰ Shirley A. Kan, *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001: Assessments and Policy Implications* RL30946, Congressional Research Service, October 10, 2001, 18 <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL30946>.

⁷¹ Michael Green et al., "Counter-Coercion Series: Harassment of the USNS *Impeccable*," *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, May 9, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-harassment-usns-impeccable/>.

⁷² Steven Lee Myers, "American and Chinese Warships Narrowly Avoid High-Seas Collision," *New York Times*, October 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/02/world/asia/china-us-warships-south-china-sea.html>.

⁷³ *U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs*, "People's Liberation Army Navy Lased a U.S. Navy P-8A in Unsafe, Unprofessional Manner," February 27, 2020. <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/news.aspx/110928>.

cases sinking and threatening to fire on fishing boats and patrol vessels from Southeast Asian countries.⁷⁴ In none of these instances was the PLAN or CCG acting to defend maritime shipping. Moreover, the United States is not a claimant in the South China Sea, and U.S. policy during these provocations did not support or deny CCP claims to sovereignty over the South China Sea.⁷⁵ The CCP has used maritime power for reasons beyond those offered by the geopolitical explanation: SLOC protection or unresolved sovereignty disputes. Rather, the PLAN and CCG appear to be executing an operational vision in which no military, certainly not that of the United States, can operate with impunity near China's shores.⁷⁶

What exactly it means to be “near” China's shores appears to be changing. With the 2001 incident, the U.S. crew of the EP-3 was close enough to China to execute an emergency landing on Hainan.⁷⁷ By the 2020 lasing incident, the U.S. Pacific Fleet reported the lased P-8A was flying approximately 380 miles west of Guam, or around 1,500 miles from China's coast.⁷⁸ The 2015 DWP for the first time referred to “open seas protection” [远海护卫] as a “strategic requirement” [战略要求] and declared that the PLAN will develop expeditionary capabilities to meet this strategic requirement.⁷⁹ Despite some PLA force structure appearing shaped to support overseas investments, PLA force employment has already demonstrated aggressive intentions in conflict with U.S. interests to operate where permitted under international law, and

⁷⁴ “Philippines Accuses Chinese Vessel of Sinking Fishing Boat in Disputed Waters,” *New York Times*, June 12, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/12/world/asia/philippines-china-fishing-boat.html>; *BBC News*, “Vietnam Boat Sinks after Collision with Chinese Vessel,” May 27, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-27583564>; Renato Cruz De Castro, “Implications of the Recent Philippines-China Naval Stand-Off,” *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, May 7, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/implications-of-the-recent-philippines-china-naval-stand-off/>.

⁷⁵ M. Taylor Fravel, *U.S. Policy Towards the Disputes in the South China Sea Since 1995*, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, March 2014, <https://taylorfravel.com/documents/research/fravel.2014.RSIS.us.policy.scs.pdf>.

⁷⁶ David M. Finkelstein, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on *The Chinese View of Strategic Competition with the United States*, June 24, 2020, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/David_Finkelstein_Testimony.pdf.

⁷⁷ Shirley A. Kan, *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001: Assessments and Policy Implications* RL30946, Congressional Research Service, October 10, 2001, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL30946>.

⁷⁸ *U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs*, “People's Liberation Army Navy Lased a U.S. Navy P-8A in Unsafe, Unprofessional Manner,” February 27, 2020, <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/news.aspx/110928>.

⁷⁹ PRC State Council Information Office, *China's Military Strategy*, May 27, 2015, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm.

public PLA force planning information appears tailored to building the blue water navy needed to realize these intentions on a larger scale.⁸⁰ The shifting geopolitical pressures explanation predicts the PLAN will be deployed to secure its SLOCs and ensure growing economic development. However, PLAN operations have indicated that the CCP has greater maritime ambitions than trade and prosperity.

Survival?

A CCP bid for survival through naval power leaves many gaps as an explanation for PRC maritime transformation. Because this explanation largely regards threat perceptions and does not specify needed naval capability or capacity, it is consistent with any PLAN able to pose a credible threat to militaries threatening to invade China. However, this narrative runs counter to the stated threat perceptions of CCP leaders. Moreover, arguments turning on claims of ethno-national character are difficult to substantiate, and the argument's proponents do not succeed in doing so.

The narrative that the PRC faces existential threat from Western powers that never deviated from Mahanian imperialist approaches does not accord with CCP pronouncements. Deng Xiaoping's 1978 declaration that "peace and development" were characteristics of the modern era was the CCP leadership's determination of fundamental dynamics of international relations, indicating a significantly lower probability of war with other major powers. Deng's "peace and development" line replaced his predecessor Mao Zedong's assessment that the international security environment was one of "war and revolution" in which the PLA should

⁸⁰ On U.S. interests, see Dzirhan Mahadzir, "SECDEF Esper: U.S. Will 'Keep Up the Pace' of South China Sea Freedom of Navigation Operations," *USNI News*, July 21, 2020, <https://news.usni.org/2020/07/21/secdef-esper-u-s-will-keep-up-the-pace-of-south-china-sea-freedom-of-navigation-operations>; *Reuters*, "Carter says U.S. will sail, fly and operate wherever international law allows," October 13, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-australia-southchinasea-carter/carter-says-u-s-will-sail-fly-and-operate-wherever-international-law-allows-idUSKCN0S72MG20151013>. On future PLAN force structure, see Alex Paper and Tate Nurkin, "China's Naval Strength: Current and Future" in *Chinese Naval Shipbuilding: An Ambitious and Uncertain Course*, ed. Andrew S. Erickson, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2016), 107-133.

expect “early war, major war, and nuclear war.”⁸¹ By contrast, “peace and development” indicated “the possibility of a world war was remote, the chance of a nuclear war between the superpowers was slight, China did not face the prospect of imminent invasion, and China would enjoy at least two decades of a peaceful international environment.”⁸² In 2002, Deng’s successor CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin renewed this assessment for another two decades by declaring at the CCP’s 16th National Congress that the PRC is enjoying a “period of strategic opportunity,” [战略机遇期] when it will be free to develop unencumbered by the threat of major war.⁸³ In 2020, the CCP Politburo, led by Xi Jinping, reaffirmed that the PRC remains in a period of strategic opportunity even despite unspecified new developments and challenges.⁸⁴ These are authoritative pronouncements which maintain Deng’s assessment that the PRC is not facing threat of a major war, including invasion by Western maritime powers.

Appeals to the absence of expansionist genes in “Chinese blood” and the presence of such genes among U.S., UK, and Japanese citizens are similarly not predictive of PLAN and CCP behavior, including the aggressive actions PLAN and CCG captains have taken against the United States and Southeast Asian countries, noted in the prior section. The CCP has demonstrated a distinct willingness to, even a proclivity toward, using force when the balance of forces permits.⁸⁵ The PLA are commonly aggressors in interstate conflict, having initiated wars against India in 1962 and against Vietnam in 1979 after intervening in the Korean War in 1950; Chinese accounts maintain both were defensive wars despite their being fought on foreign or

⁸¹ David M. Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders its National Security: “The Great Peace and Development Debate of 1999,”* CNA Memorandum D0014464.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, December 2000), 8.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Jiang Zemin, “Build a Well-off Society in an All-Round Way and Create a New Situation in Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics [全面建设小康社会，开创中国特色社会主义事业新局面], (speech, Sixteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, November 8, 2002), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/zyjh_674906/t10855.shtml.

⁸⁴ *Xinhua*, “Critical Information! Xi Jinping, Presiding over a Politburo Conference, Made These Major Determinations,” [重磅信息！习近平主持中央政治局会议定了这些大事], July 30, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/xxjxs/2020-07/30/c_1126306305.htm.

⁸⁵ Christopher A. Ford, “Realpolitik with Chinese Characteristics: Chinese Strategic Culture and the Modern Communist Party-State,” in *Strategic Asia 2016-17: Understanding Strategic Cultures in the Asia-Pacific*, eds. Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills, (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2016), 42-46.

disputed soil.⁸⁶ PLA strategy and doctrine also facilitate escalatory behavior. Some PLA literature suggests even firing direct shots on foreign vessels may be reasonable crisis control activities for persuading a foreign vessel to leave an area.⁸⁷ Further, PLA strategists develop bellicose doctrine that does not reflect a largely defensive strategy. The last two editions of the PLA Academy of Military Science's *Science of Military Strategy* include discussions of the PLA's need to develop capabilities of "war control," [战争控制] an operational concept describing controlling, even escalating or extending, military crises for political benefit rather than seeking de-escalation.⁸⁸ Ethno-nationalist claims of an inherently peaceful Chinese national character appear distinctly disconnected from national history and modern doctrine, lending credence to Andrew Scobell's assessment that the CCP is an entity that "assertively protects and aggressively promotes its own national interests, up to and including acts of war, but that rationalizes all military moves as purely self-defensive."⁸⁹ If any military act can be rationalized as self-defensive, then when facing a marked Chinese naval buildup, the United States cannot interpret claims that the CCP is without "expansionist genes" as an absence of threat.

Framing CCP Intent

Each of the three existing explanations for PRC maritime transformation are predicated on a belief that the PRC's and PLA's activities, and any developments therein, largely reflect

⁸⁶ Oriana Skylar Mastro, "The Theory and Practice of War Termination: Assessing Patterns in China's Historical Behavior," *International Studies Review* 20 (2018), 661-684, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/vix061>.

⁸⁷ Alison Kaufman, written response to question for the record, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on *The Chinese View of Strategic Competition with the United States*, June 24, 2020, 215, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-08/June_24_2020_Hearing_Transcript_0.pdf.

⁸⁸ Alison A. Kaufman and Daniel M. Hartnett, *Managing Conflict: Examining Recent PLA Writings on Escalation Control*, CNA, February 2016, https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DRM-2015-U-009963-Final3.pdf; Lonnie D. Henley, "Evolving Chinese Concepts of War Control and Escalation Management," in *Assessing the Threat: The Chinese Military and Taiwan's Security*, eds. Michael D. Swaine et al., (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), 85-110; Edmund J. Burke et al., "People's Liberation Army Operational Concepts," RAND Corporation, 2020, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA394-1.html; Howard Wang, "The Ideal Tool of Nations: War Control in Chinese Military Thought," *Georgetown Security Studies Review* 7, iss. 1, (January 2019), 6-26.

⁸⁹ Andrew Scobell, *China's Use of Military Force: Beyond the Great Wall and the Long March*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 38.

and can be used to determine CCP intentions. However, the explanations' inability to offer interpretations of CCP intentions that are predictive of PLA activities reveal limits to this assumption, which ultimately confuses enduring intentions with transient approaches.⁹⁰ While the naval nationalism and geopolitical explanations may have appeared more likely in the early 2000s given then-contemporary PLAN force structure and force employment, they have not been robust to uncertainty over time. Instead, these approaches overinterpreted transient factors such as rising PRC domestic nationalism and the CCP's risk-minimization approach to economic development. Explanations which overinterpret transient factors as enduring political intention have limited predictive power for determining long-term policy trajectories involved in maritime transformation, such as reshaping a navy. To accurately assess the threat PRC maritime transformation poses to the United States, any analysis must examine proclivity towards conflict or competition in enduring CCP intention while accounting for the obfuscating but ultimately transient effect of limited resources or capabilities. Drawing on expert analytical views, this section argues that CCP intention can be most accurately derived from select official Party and government documents, while current or developing PLA activities are, taken alone, unreliable indicators of enduring CCP interests.

Cheap Talk and Grand Strategy: Identifying Authoritative Sources

Maritime transformation is a shift in grand strategic vision, necessarily emerging from enduring interests and intentions. The record of elite CCP policy speeches and planning documents offer open source accounts of the CCP's enduring intentions and should be given outsized influence in assessing intention and threat. Given their public nature and often-

⁹⁰ Michael Kofman makes a cogent argument to similar effect: "Defense planners tend to incorrectly infer adversary intentions and strategy from military capabilities, and wrongly believe that the impetus behind the *fait accompli* [strategy] is an adversary's reading of the military balance...Interpreting political intent or military strategy on the basis of select military capabilities has led to planning for fights that don't make much sense, or fights that do make sense, but where the adversary strategy and political rationale does not seem well understood." See Michael Kofman, "Getting the Fait Accompli Problem Right in U.S. Strategy," *War on the Rocks*, November 3, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/11/getting-the-fait-accompl-problem-right-in-u-s-strategy/>.

belligerent tone despite robust economic ties between the United States and the PRC, some scholars⁹¹ dismiss elite CCP policy pronouncements as “cheap talk,” or information sharing in which the sharer has not substantiated or otherwise made credible a position by accepting costs to maintain it.⁹² The caution is salient given rife overestimation of cheap talk among U.S. analyses of CCP policy: books such as *Unrestricted Warfare*, written by two PLA colonels in their personal capacities, and exhortations by CCP General Secretaries to “prepare for war” are commonly misinterpreted as authoritative indicators of CCP intent.⁹³ These examples do not undermine the authority of consensus-driven, bureaucracy-directing policy pronouncements delivered from the highest echelons of the CCP.

The CCP’s authoritative policy pronouncements are products of a costly consensus-building process necessitated by the regime’s authoritarian nature. Without meaningful elections renewing the CCP’s absolute control over offices with governing authority in the PRC, the Chinese Party-society relationship lacks an obvious means of legitimizing CCP rule.⁹⁴ As such, CCP elites must continuously prosecute strategies of inclusion with Party and state elites to maintain their ruling legitimacy, thus opening opportunities for bargaining within the Party as well as between Party, state, and society in the CCP’s policymaking process.⁹⁵ The scale of this

⁹¹ See, for example, Josh Shiffrin, Twitter thread on CCP documents as cheap talk, May 11, 2020, <https://twitter.com/shiffrin/status/1259862258030727171>.

⁹² Joseph Farrell and Matthew Rabin, “Cheap Talk,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 10, no. 3 (Summer 1996), 103-118, <https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.10.3.103>; Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, (1966 reprint, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 35.

⁹³ Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999); M. Taylor Fravel, “No, Hu Didn’t Call for War,” *The Diplomat*, December 10, 2011, <http://web.archive.org/web/20120109082723/http://the-diplomat.com/china-power/2011/12/10/no-hu-didnt-call-for-war/>; Peter Mattis, “So You Want To Be a PLA Expert?,” *War on the Rocks*, November 19, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/11/so-you-want-to-be-a-pla-expert-2/>; Alastair Iain Johnston, “Shaky Foundations: The ‘Intellectual Architecture’ of Trump’s China Policy,” *Survival* 61, iss. 2 (2019), 189-202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2019.1589096>.

⁹⁴ Bruce J. Dickson, *The Dictator’s Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party’s Strategy for Survival*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6-7; Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard and Zheng Yongnian, “Introduction: Bringing the Party Back In,” in *Bringing the Party Back In: How China is Governed*, eds. Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard and Zheng Yongnian, (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004), 6-8. For an account of challenges the CCP regime has faced to its legitimacy and how the CCP has responded, see Joseph Yu-shek Chang, “Evolution of the Party Since 1976: Ideological and functional adoptions,” in *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Communist Party*, ed. Willy Wo-Lap Lam, (London: Routledge, 2018), 135-152.

⁹⁵ Bruce J. Dickson, *The Dictator’s Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party’s Strategy for Survival*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 214-261; David M. Lampton, “A Plum for a Peach: Bargaining, Interest, and Bureaucratic

bargaining should not be understated: David Lampton described the bureaucratic aspects of the CCP's governing system as distinctive for how frequently a decision might require many individuals or groups to reach consensus before action can be taken.⁹⁶ Lucian Pye observed that factionalism in the CCP has previously given rise to political “immobilism” while intraparty conflicts are resolved out of public view.⁹⁷ Bargaining and the leverage to do so is rife between CCP elites as well as between CCP principals and their agents in the state bureaucracy. PRC academics recognize the leverage members of state and society have when bargaining with the CCP elite, noting the popular refrain, “the higher ups may have policies, but those below have countermeasures” [上有政策，下有对策], is a reality of governing in China.⁹⁸ The phrase's entry on Baidu Baike, an online encyclopedia subject to PRC content requirements, describes it as a mentality “pervasive through all levels of Party and government work committees in China.”⁹⁹

Pressures to achieve consensus among key stakeholders constrain the CCP elite policy making process while simultaneously lending authority to their products. The Political Work Report delivered every five years at the National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party¹⁰⁰

Politics in China,” in *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, eds. Kenneth G. Lieberthal and David M. Lampton, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 34. For detailed case studies in how flexible factions within the CCP shape Party decision-making, see Larry M. Wortzel, “The Tiananmen Massacre Reappraised: Public Protest, Urban Warfare, and the People's Liberation Army,” in *Chinese National Security Decisionmaking Under Stress*, eds. Andrew Scobell and Larry M. Wortzel, (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), 55-73; Willy Wo-Lap Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping, Renaissance, Reform, or Retrogression?*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 5-23.

⁹⁶ David M. Lampton, “A Plum for a Peach: Bargaining, Interest, and Bureaucratic Politics in China,” in *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, eds. Kenneth G. Lieberthal and David M. Lampton, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 34-35.

⁹⁷ Lucian W. Pye, “The Dynamics of Factions and Consensus in Chinese Politics: A Model and Some Propositions,” *RAND Corporation*, July 1980, 18, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a089301.pdf>.

⁹⁸ Tang Tianwei and Tang Renwu, “Experts: ‘The Higher Ups Have their Policies but We Have Our Countermeasures’ Engulfs Reform” [专家: “上有政策下有对策”吞噬改革], *The People's Daily*, September 10, 2013, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/0910/c112851-22869297.html>.

⁹⁹ ““上有政策，下有对策”是当前中国普遍存在于各级党委和政府工作中的一种极其不良的现象” See *Baidu Baike* [百度], “The Higher Ups Have Their Policies but Those Below Have Countermeasures (Social Problem)” [上有政策，下有对策（社会问题）], accessed October 17, 2020,

<https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E4%B8%8A%E6%9C%89%E6%94%BF%E7%AD%96%E5%AF%B9%E7%AD%96/12120296>; Eva Woo, “Baidu's Censored Answer to Wikipedia,” *Bloomberg*, November 13, 2007, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2007-11-13/baidus-censored-answer-to-wikipedia-business-week-business-stock-market-and-financial-advice>.

¹⁰⁰ Hereafter, Party Congress.

is “the most significant document of governance in contemporary China,” endowed with the authority to “set the fundamental guidelines for the Party in the years to come” precisely because it is the product of a consensus-building process designed to secure buy-in across the Party elite; according to Wu Guoguang [吴国光], who in 1987 participated in drafting the 13th Party Congress Work Report as a member of the CCP central policy group on political reform, the consensus-building ahead of the Party Congress is far more important in setting the CCP’s agenda than the proceedings of the Party Congress itself.¹⁰¹ The Work Report’s yearlong consensus-building process is one that constrains the CCP General Secretary from exercising plenary power and in exchange reflects a broad leadership consensus in its concessions.¹⁰² The authority-conferring process of consensus-building is not exclusive to setting five-year guidelines delivered at Party Congresses; the same process legitimizes the CCP’s day-to-day governance on national and regional levels.¹⁰³ For example, the Central Foreign Affairs Commission and its predecessor, the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group,¹⁰⁴ does not submit recommendations to the Politburo until consensus is reached among its members, which

¹⁰¹ Wu Guoguang, *China’s Party Congress: Power, Legitimacy, and Institutional Manipulation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 124-125; *ChinaFile*, “Wu Guoguang,” July 26, 2017, <https://www.chinafile.com/contributors/wu-guoguang>.

¹⁰² Alice Miller, “How to Read Xi Jinping’s 19th Party Congress Political Report,” *China Leadership Monitor* 53, May 25, 2017, <https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/clm53am.pdf>.

¹⁰³ For a systematic account of how PRC government work reports are uniformly produced through a consensus-building consultative process which bolsters support for CCP governing legitimacy, see Wang Zhen, “Government Work Reports: Securing State Legitimacy through Institutionalization,” *The China Quarterly* 229, (March 2017), 195-204, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741016001521>.

¹⁰⁴ Leading Small Groups [领导小组 or 党组] are policy coordination groups which facilitate CCP consensus-building efforts along the current set of leaders’ policy inclinations by including senior CCP leaders as well as likely candidates for next-generation leadership. The most important groups, including the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group, are chaired by a member of the Politburo. In 2018, the CCP promulgated wide-ranging government reorganization regulations which elevated the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group into the newly-created Central Foreign Affairs Commission [中央外事工作委员会] chaired by Xi Jinping. While Leading Small Groups are restricted to coordinating policy discourse [议事协调], Commissions are authorized to make policy decisions [决策]. On leading small groups, see Alice Miller, “The CCP Central Committee’s Leading Small Groups,” *China Leadership Monitor* 26, September 2, 2008, <https://media.hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/CLM26AM.pdf>. On the 2018 government reform plan, see *Xinhua*, “The CCP Central Committee Issues the ‘Deepening Party and State Institution Reform Plan’ [中共中央印发《深化党和国家机构改革方案》], March 21, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-03/21/c_1122570517.htm. On the policymaking powers accorded to commissions, see *Xinhua*, “(Authorized Release) CCP Central Committee Decision on Deepening Reform of Party and State Institutions” [（授权发布）中共中央关于深化党和国家机构改革的决定], March 4, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-03/04/c_1122485476.htm.

includes comparatively junior Party members being prepared for the next generation of leadership.¹⁰⁵ The policy pronouncements and official documents produced from these consensus-building processes are not without authority or cost. In fact, the opposite is true: the CCP's consensus-building process is so laborious and often brittle that the costs associated with changing or reversing course on a decided policy are often prohibitive.¹⁰⁶

CCP leader speeches and official documents produced from a consultative process are not cheap talk. They derive authority from a laborious process by which the Party maintains its authoritarian regime. As such, these documents are authoritative sources of CCP intentions, and the long-running record of these documents reveal the CCP's enduring interests.

Principal-Agent Problems in CCP Authority

One tradeoff of the CCP's consensus-driven authority is that the most authoritative documents are also the most bargained over and therefore the most vague.¹⁰⁷ The CCP and PRC are aggregate entities of networked constituencies and as such are subject to principal-agent problems common to any policymaking network: network actors with bargaining power have discrete interests and incentives, share asymmetric interdependencies, and can expect those interests, incentives, and interdependencies to change over time.¹⁰⁸ Vague guiding documents which different actors can interpret according to their own interests facilitate

¹⁰⁵ Taylor Fravel's research demonstrates top-level military decision making follows a similar structure, in which the CCP is only able to change its top-level military strategy with both high Party cohesion and a PLA judgment that a nature of warfare that the CCP is likely to experience has changed. M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019). On the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group, see Taeho Kim, "Leading Small Groups: Managing All Under Heaven," in *China's Leadership in the 21st Century: The Rise of the Fourth Generation*, eds. David M. Finkelstein and Maryanne Kivlehan, (London: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 126-128.

¹⁰⁶ Kerry Brown, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on U.S.-China Relations in 2020: Enduring Problems and Emerging Challenges, September 29, 2020, 3-4, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/Brown_Testimony.pdf; Zhao Suisheng, "China's Foreign Policy Making Process: Players and Institutions," in *China & The World*, ed. David Shambaugh, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 92-93.

¹⁰⁷ On the vagueness of the Party Congress Work Report, see Joel Wuthnow, "Deciphering China's Intentions: What Can Open Sources Tell Us?," *The Asan Forum*, July 29, 2019, <http://www.theasanforum.org/deciphering-chinas-intentions-what-can-open-sources-tell-us/>.

¹⁰⁸ Lester M. Salamon, "The New Governance and the Tools of Public Action: An Introduction," in *The Tools of Government: A Guide to the New Governance*, ed. Lester M. Salamon, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 13.

consensus-building, making these documents more authoritative while creating room for misalignment between national and bureaucratic interests.¹⁰⁹ The CCP attempts to manage this misalignment as a form of federalism, continuing a Maoist legacy of vague leader decisions that empower regional and local implementers to innovate.¹¹⁰ More recent CCP leaders temper the governing chaos that characterized Mao's governance with a well-defined hierarchy of central government document types (e.g., orders [命令], decisions [决定], regulations [规定], opinions [意见], and so on) in which documents issued at the highest ranks must be implemented without delay, while lower-ranked documents offer growing degrees of flexibility in implementation.¹¹¹

Despite the CCP's efforts to manage its principal-agent governance problem, some gaps between CCP interest and PLA interest exist. PLA resistance to CCP reforms has been a consistent issue.¹¹² A 1998 CCP directive that the PLA must divest from operating businesses using military resources was largely ignored, inciting the need for a renewed order in 2015.¹¹³ Similarly, modern PLA training exercises exhibit weaknesses which longtime analyst Dennis Blasko argues represent "multiple systemic failures to execute Jiang Zemin's guidance from two decades ago" to improve the quality of PLA equipment and training.¹¹⁴ Beyond resisting CCP reforms, the PLA has occasionally exhibited outsized influence in shaping the CCP foreign

¹⁰⁹ For a case study of how the coordination problem gives rise to misaligned interests under the same vague authority, see Roland Paris, "Understanding the 'coordination problem' in postwar statebuilding," in *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the contradictions of postwar peace operations*, eds. Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk, (London: Routledge, 2009), 53-78.

¹¹⁰ Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry, "Embracing Uncertainty: Guerrilla Policy Style and Adaptive Governance in China," in *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China*, eds. Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), 11-15.

¹¹¹ CCP Central Committee General Office, "Regulations on Processing Documents from Party and Government Organs" [党政机关公文处理工作条例], February 22, 2013, http://www.gov.cn/zwggk/2013-02/22/content_2337704.htm; Andrew Mertha, "Bureaucracy and Policy Making," in *The SAGE Handbook of Contemporary China Vol. 1*, eds. Weiping Wu and Mark W. Frazier, (London: SAGE Publications, 2018), 376-378.

¹¹² For a recent study on PLA institutional interests and ability to act as an interest group, see Isaac B. Kardon and Phillip C. Saunders, "Reconsidering the PLA as an Interest Group," in *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 33-53.

¹¹³ James Mulvenon, "PLA Divestiture 2.0: We Mean It This Time," *China Leadership Monitor* 50, July 19, 2016, <https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/clm50jm.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ Dennis J. Blasko, "PLA Weaknesses and Xi's Concerns about PLA Capabilities," written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on *Backlash from Abroad: The Limits of Beijing's Power to Shape its External Environment*, February 7, 2019, 14, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Blasko_USCC%20Testimony_FINAL.pdf.

policy agenda. Beginning in the late 1980s, for example, a PLAN interested in expanding its mission set successfully cornered CCP elites into pursuing an aggressive military expansion in the South China Sea, forcing the CCP leaders to set aside concerns of budgetary limits and risks of diplomatic isolation.¹¹⁵ As such, PLA actions and capabilities may reflect their own bureaucratic interests or create within the CCP a transient interest of placating PLA interests.

PLA actions and capabilities are not reliable indicators of CCP intentions. In fact, PLA actions and capabilities may obfuscate enduring CCP interests insofar as the PLA's bureaucratic interests conflict with or prevail over CCP political interests. Reflecting the authority of elite CCP documents produced by a consultative process and recognizing the obfuscating nature principal-agent problems may pose to analysts attempting to understand CCP intent through PLA capability, this thesis will consider PRC and PLA capabilities as either reinforcing or countervailing CCP intentions, not reliable indicators of such, when assessing the threat of PRC maritime transformation to the United States.

Research Approach: Net Assessment

This thesis draws on the net assessment approach. For the purposes of this research, net assessment is a comparative analysis, comprehensive across military and nonmilitary variables, which diagnoses problems and opportunities in long-running strategic interaction between national security establishments. These establishments, once informed of their problems and opportunities, can formulate competitive strategies around the disadvantages and advantages on which a competition turns. A net assessment's diagnosis thus serves as the foundation of "a system of competitive strategy based on long-term interaction between national security establishments along with an advanced understanding of organizational dynamics."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ John W. Garver, China's Push Through the South China Sea: The Interaction of Bureaucratic and National Interests," *The China Quarterly* 132, (December 1992), 999-1028, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000045513>.

¹¹⁶ Michael Evans, "The Sage of the Pentagon," *Quadrant*, June 1, 2015.

In short, net assessment is a way to understand a potential adversary's enduring political intentions, evaluate their bureaucratic performance in light of those intentions, and from that evaluation identify threats to the assessor as well as potential vulnerabilities in the assessed. Competitive strategies can then be developed from that understanding of threat to oneself and opportunity to exploit vulnerabilities in others.

Net assessment is an approach rather than a method, and as such, it is also a concept that has been varying defined. A DoD directive describes it as the “comparative analysis of military, technological, political, economic, and other factors governing the relative military capability of nations,” typically to understand a military balance between two or more competitors or to understand the landscape of international strategic competition.¹¹⁷ The same DoD directive further argues the purpose of net assessment is to identify “problems and opportunities that deserve the attention of senior defense officials.”¹¹⁸ However, the scope of net assessment extends beyond the defense bureaucracy to consider all variables relevant to competitions taking place between national security establishments in both war and peace.¹¹⁹ As former net assessors James Roche and Thomas Mahnken explain, “senior officials have a compelling need to assess the posture of the United States vis-à-vis potential adversaries taking into account the relevant non-military variables.”¹²⁰

Net assessment's scope is necessarily broad because it is a precursor to developing competitive strategies. Competitive strategies focus on the “peacetime use of latent military power...to shape a competitor's choices in ways that favor our objectives. Specifically, the competitive strategies approach focuses on peacetime interaction among and between defense

¹¹⁷ United States Department of Defense, “Director of Net Assessment,” Directive 5011.11, December 23, 2009, 1-4.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Stephen Peter Rosen, “Net Assessment as an Analytical Concept,” in *On Not Confusing Ourselves: Essays on National Security Strategy in Honor of Albert & Roberta Wohlstetter*, eds. Andrew W. Marshall, J. J. Martin, and Henry S. Rowen (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 165.

¹²⁰ James G. Roche and Thomas G. Mahnken, “What is Net Assessment?” in *Net Assessment and Military Strategy: Retrospective and Prospective Essays*, ed. Thomas G. Mahnken, (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2020), 14.

establishments.”¹²¹ The competitive strategies approach begins with the assumption that large organizations, including national security establishments, are intended to systematize activities and so are designed not to change; as such, these establishments may be locked into static routines unsuited to long-term changes in a dynamic security environment. These gaps between established routines and the changing world become vulnerabilities in strategic competition, and because no two national security establishments are identical, the gaps will inevitably vary and constitute organizational asymmetries.¹²² That is, all national security establishments have gaps, but they are not likely to be the same gaps. If these gaps are enduring, they become strengths and weaknesses on which long-term strategic competition might turn. A state locked in strategic competition with an adversary can shape its competitor’s choices by driving the competition to areas in which it has enduring strengths but its adversary has enduring weaknesses and by resisting any developments to the contrary. Net assessment uses comprehensive comparative analysis to identify these gaps. Because these gaps arise from complexes of variables specific to particular competitions between certain national security establishments at specific points in time, there is no universally applicable template, formula, or method for conducting a net assessment.¹²³

Using the net assessment approach, this thesis rejects the unitary rational actor assumption in which capabilities indicate intent and thus threat to other states.¹²⁴ This thesis’s approach lowers the unit of analysis from a unitary state to the national security establishments of interacting states to assess whether and how PRC maritime transformation has changed the peacetime strategic environment at sea and what the future trajectory of this change might be.

¹²¹ Thomas G. Mahnken, “Thinking about Competitive Strategies” in *Competitive Strategies for the 21st Century: Theory, History, and Practice*, ed. Thomas G. Mahnken, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 7.

¹²² Stephen Peter Rosen, “Competitive Strategies: Theoretical Foundations, Limits, and Extensions” in *Competitive Strategies for the 21st Century: Theory, History, and Practice*, ed. Thomas G. Mahnken, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 13-16.

¹²³ Jeffrey S. McKittrick, “Analytical Tools and Techniques” in *Net Assessment and Military Strategy: Retrospective and Prospective Essays*, ed. Thomas G. Mahnken (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2020), 196.

¹²⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979), 118-119.

The assessment will also consider enduring strengths and weaknesses endogenous to how the CCP's national security establishment conceptualizes and implements its ongoing maritime transformation.

Organization of the Study

Until this point, this thesis has only discussed CCP intentions and PLA capabilities. However, maritime transformation is a shift in grand strategy, not defense planning. As such, this net assessment will not be a traditional study of a military balance but rather a broader examination of USG-CCP¹²⁵ strategic competition in the maritime space, to include military, political, and economic lines of effort. As will be demonstrated in the next sections, both U.S. and CCP policy planners understand their bilateral relationship in these terms.

Eliot Cohen, once a Military Assistant to the Director of Net Assessment, offers a valuable guide for conducting net assessments measuring military balances between two or more competitors. This thesis will modify Cohen's template to consider a strategic balance rather than strictly a military one. Cohen lists four key points for net assessment: 1) frame the nature of the balance, 2) identify long-term trends, 3) understand differing concepts of operations, and 4) identify asymmetries in objectives and capabilities.¹²⁶ This thesis will largely follow Cohen's structure. The first two sections of this net assessment comprise an executive summary and introduction of the research question, existing literature, and research approach. The third section will address the assessment's geographic, functional, and temporal parameters. The fourth section will describe the evolution of PRC grand strategy, its maritime transformation, and the military strategy necessary to implement CCP strategy over time. The

¹²⁵ Several instruments of Chinese sea power, including the naval and parnaval services, are controlled through Party, not State, instruments. As such, an accurate view of Chinese sea power regards the competition between the USG and the CCP, not the PRC.

¹²⁶ Eliot A. Cohen, "Net Assessment: An American Approach," Memorandum No. 29, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (JCSS), (Tel Aviv, Israel: JCSS, April 1990), <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/net-assessment-an-american-approach/>.

fifth section will contextualize this maritime transformation by introducing competing U.S. interests and capabilities in the relevant theater. Taken together, the third, fourth, and fifth sections address the nature of the balance. The thesis proceeds from the strategic level to the operational level in the sixth section, which details significant trends and operational asymmetries shaping the trajectory of USG-CCP maritime competition. The seventh section will contextualize these trends with case studies of U.S. and CCP policy interactions in the South China Sea. A final section will leverage the assembled information to conduct an alternative futures analysis.

III. Parameters: How to Think about the USG-CCP Maritime Balance

This thesis argues that PRC maritime transformation takes place in the context of USG-CCP strategic competition. The USG and CCP have published strategic documents describing the United States as the world's dominant power and the PRC as an emerging power challenging the global status quo.¹²⁷ As the following sections will demonstrate, the object of this challenge is relative strategic influence, defined in this thesis as a state's ability to compel desired behaviors from other states. Arguably, the most significant international strategic influence is exerted through security cooperation agreements, up to and including formal military alliances.¹²⁸

The current state of play reveals the stakes of USG-CCP strategic competition: under General Secretary Xi Jinping, the CCP has consistently championed an explicitly-stated objective of advancing a “new model of interstate relations” [新型国际关系] defined by a multipolar system fostering “win-win cooperation” that would displace the current U.S.-

¹²⁷ U.S. White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 18, 2017, 26-28, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>; PRC State Council Information Office, *China and the World in the New Era*, September 27, 2019, 29, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html.

¹²⁸ Victor Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Zachary Selden, *Alignment, Alliance, and American Grand Strategy*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 38-40; Glen Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 21.

dominated model, which CCP officials and documents describe as a Cold War-era relic tantamount to a hegemonic power structure.¹²⁹ Xi's latest Work Report, delivered to the CCP 19th Party Congress in 2017, announced that the PRC will "encourage the transformation of the global governance system."¹³⁰ The PRC's State Council Information Office released a subsequent white paper clarifying that evolution as one to a multipolar world in which no one country or bloc, implying the United States and its allies, is globally dominant. This proposed evolution has consequences beyond global security architecture:¹³¹ the same white paper articulates the CCP's argument that the world has entered a "new era" defined by the economic rise of developing countries such as the PRC and retrenchment in the overextended West.¹³²

The "new era" narrative claims Chinese economic growth is catalyzing an ongoing, fundamental change to the world economic and political system, and the U.S. and its allies must make room for the now rich and powerful PRC by abandoning military alliances to which the United States is party.¹³³ For its part, the USG considers the CCP a revisionist power leveraging

¹²⁹ Xi Jinping, "Keeping Pace with the Trend of the Times and Promoting Peace and Development for the World" [顺应时代前进潮流, 促进世界和平发展] (speech, Moscow Institute of International Relations, Moscow, Russia, March 23, 2013), <http://cpc.people.com.cn/xuexi/n/2015/0721/c397563-27337993.html>; Xi Jinping, "New Asian Security Concept For New Progress in Security Cooperation," (speech, Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, Shanghai, PRC, May 21, 2014), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1159951.shtml; PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation*, January 11, 2017, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1429771.shtml; PRC State Council Information Office, *China and the World in the New Era*, September 27, 2019, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html.

¹³⁰ The official English translation of Xi's work report strikes a somewhat softer tone than the Chinese version. The official English translation of this quote calls for the "evolution" rather than "transformation" of the global governance system. Yet Xi calls on the CCP to "transform" [变革] the global system, connoting a more urgent process of greater scale than "evolution," [演变] which implies a more gradual process. The full sentence reads, "倡导构建人类命运共同体, 促进全球治理体系变革。" Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era [习近平: 决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告], (speech, Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017), http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm.

¹³¹ This thesis refers to security architecture as defined by William Tow and Brendan Taylor: "an overarching, coherent and comprehensive security structure for a geographically-defined area, which facilitates the resolution of that region's policy concerns and achieves its security objectives." See William T. Tow and Brendan Taylor, "What is Asian security architecture?" *Review of International Studies* 36, iss. 1, (2010), 95-116, 96, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509990520>.

¹³² PRC State Council Information Office, *China and the World in the New Era*, September 27, 2019, 3 & 30, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html.

¹³³ PRC State Council Information Office, *China and the World in the New Era*, September 27, 2019, 30-33,

its increasing capabilities to reorder the Indo-Pacific geopolitical dynamic to Chinese strategic advantage and in accordance with authoritarian principles.¹³⁴ To the extent that the USG resists the CCP's destruction of its security architecture, the U.S. and PRC are locked in competition for strategic influence. As will be demonstrated in this thesis, the USG aspires to preserve its strategic influence broadly to thicken, expand, and internetwork existing alliance systems, while the CCP aims to accrue strategic influence vis-à-vis the U.S. and undermine the security partnerships which affords the U.S. outsized strategic influence.

Sea Power

The USG-CCP competition for strategic influence involves a significant maritime component, in which sea power will confer a significant advantage. This thesis uses Alfred Thayer Mahan's concept of sea power, which has two key components: 1) market access to overseas resources and 2) battlefield command which guarantees such access when challenged.¹³⁵ More simply, sea power describes a state's ability to securely benefit from the oceans. According to Mahan's classic formulation, a state with sea power necessarily has domestic industry, overseas markets, the ships to access them, and navies able to secure that access.¹³⁶ Yet sea power is something a state can have as well as exert. Each component has strategic implications: market access facilitates economic interdependence, navies confer threats or reassurances, and fleet sizes determine the scale of those implications. A state pursues sea power for economic gain but develops a sea power strategy to advance political

http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html.

¹³⁴ U.S. Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision*, November 3, 2019, 5, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>.

¹³⁵ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, (1890; reprint, New York: Dover, 1987), 138; Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy 2nd ed.*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 36.

¹³⁶ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, (1890; reprint, New York: Dover, 1987), 71; James R. Holmes, *A Brief Guide to Maritime Strategy*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 23.

objectives, including changing a regional or global balance of power.¹³⁷ In this way, international strategic competition in the maritime domain is animated by competing sea power strategies.

These strategies are shaped by the nature and objects of their competition. The CCP asserts that the PRC is the primary force stabilizing and powering the world economy.¹³⁸ From that status, it claims the right to lead what it argues is a necessary reshaping of interstate relations, including the eventual breakup of U.S. alliances.¹³⁹ Whether other nations agree or can be persuaded to act in agreement with this assertion to the detriment of U.S. strategic influence defines the essential character of the overall USG-CCP strategic competition. The extent to which maritime theaters can be leveraged to gain an advantage defines the character of the USG-CCP maritime balance. How the CCP plans to gain that advantage defines its sea power strategy.

The CCP's sea power strategy draws on the PRC's still-emerging sea power. The PRC and Imperial China before it are historically continental powers pursuing grand strategies with continentalist visions. The CCP's turn toward sea power in strategic competition is a comparatively new phenomenon which constitutes a maritime transformation. PRC maritime transformation serves to build the CCP's sea power and exert it in strategic competition, not least against the United States.

Sea power is not the same as naval power, and maritime transformation is not a strictly military endeavor.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, neither the CCP or USG pursue sea power or command of the

¹³⁷ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, (1890; reprint, New York: Dover, 1987), 82.

¹³⁸ PRC State Council Information Office, *China and the World in the New Era*, September 27, 2019, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html.

¹³⁹ PRC State Council Information Office, *China and the World in the New Era*, September 27, 2019, 30-33, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html.

¹⁴⁰ Mahan's classic formulation of sea power includes 1) domestic production, 2) commercial shipping and the navies to protect them, and 3) colonies and markets abroad. Naval power alone is at best one half of one link in the chain of sea power. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, (1890; reprint, New York: Dover, 1987), 70-71. For additional discussions on this perspective, see Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle J. Goldstein, "Introduction: Chinese Perspectives on Maritime Transformation," in *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), XIV; James R. Holmes, *A Brief Guide to Maritime Strategy*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press,

seas as ends in themselves. Rather, states develop sea power strategies to exert sea power in pursuit of continental political objectives.¹⁴¹ As such, sea power itself is not strategic influence, nor is completing a maritime transformation the end goal of strategic competition. It is a means, not an end. In the context of competing sea power strategies, sea power is the latent economic and military resources and capabilities that a state can leverage to accrue strategic influence in maritime theaters.¹⁴²

Time Frame

To capture long-term trends, this assessment's temporal scope will run from approximately 1999 to 2049, both dates marked by CCP objectives for strategic competition. Specifically, the CCP anticipates that the bulk of USG-CCP strategic competition will take place between these years. While neither the USG nor this thesis need to subscribe to this perception, that the CCP appears to believe it makes these dates bookends to an important range of USG-CCP strategic competition.

1999 is the year the CCP modulated Deng Xiaoping's policy axiom, that "peace and development are the theme of the times," [和平与发展是当代世界的主题] to allow for active strategic competition with the United States.¹⁴³ If CCP leaders believe 1999 is the start of long-term USG-CCP strategic competition, they almost certainly believe it will end by 2049. That year marks the centennial anniversary of the PRC's founding, and General Secretary Xi Jinping's

2019), 22-24.

¹⁴¹ Mahanian sea power regarded the maritime domain as a commons for trade and considered navies necessary only insofar as they secure that trade. This concept emphasizes the use of the sea as a commons and the means to secure that use for a country's political purposes and does not call for countries to construct political identities dependent on long-term sea control. In this way, Mahanian sea power is in the service of continental objectives and not an end in itself. See Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, (1890; reprint, New York: Dover, 1987), 25-27; Andrew Lambert, *Seapower States: Maritime Culture, Continental Empires and the Conflict That Made the Modern World*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 4 & 18. For a similar argument, see Wayne P. Hughes Jr. and Robert P. Girrier, *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations* 3rd ed., (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 24-25.

¹⁴² Andrew Lambert, *Seapower States: Maritime Culture, Continental Empires and the Conflict That Made the Modern World*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 4-7.

¹⁴³ This will be addressed in detail in the section "Prelude: Toward Strategic Opportunity, 1993 to 1999."

2017 Work Report strongly implied it is the deadline for the CCP to realize its ultimate, loosely defined goal of “national rejuvenation” [民族复兴].¹⁴⁴

Theater

This assessment’s geographic scope will cover the Indo-Pacific region and distinguish between theater waters nearby and distant from continental China. The U.S. Department of Defense and Department of State have both identified the Indo-Pacific as top priorities.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, the latest (2013) edition of the PLA Academy of Military Science’s *Science of Military Strategy*, an authoritative publication on PLA strategic thought which one leading scholar describes as “the apex of the PLA’s professional military literature on the study of war,” identifies a corresponding “two oceans region” [两样地区] which at minimum covers an “arc shaped strategic zone that covers the western Pacific Ocean and the northern Indian Ocean” but may also describe an expanse beyond the full breadth of the Indian and Pacific Oceans.¹⁴⁶ The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* describes interlinked strategic spaces with continental China as support and backstop [本土为依托], the two oceans region as the focal point [两样地区为重点], and space and cyber domains as the crux [太空和网络空间为关键].¹⁴⁷ Within the Indo-Pacific, the PRC additionally distinguishes between its coastal “near seas” [近海], comprising

¹⁴⁴ Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era [习近平：决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告], (speech, Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017), http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm.

¹⁴⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019, cover letter, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>; U.S. Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision*, November 3, 2019, 4, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>.

¹⁴⁶ M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Changing Approach to Military Strategy: The Science of Military Strategy from 2001 and 2013,” in *China’s Evolving Military Strategy*, ed. Joe McReynolds, (Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2017), 43; Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), 106 & 246-247. Also see Andrew Erickson’s discussion of this region in Andrew S. Erickson, “China’s Blueprint for Sea Power,” *China Brief*, July 6, 2016, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-blueprint-for-sea-power/>.

¹⁴⁷ Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), 246.

the Bohai, Yellow, East China, South China Seas, and waters east of Taiwan, and the “far seas” [远海] beyond.¹⁴⁸ Of the near seas, the South China Sea merits special attention following its designation as a “core interest”¹⁴⁹ by CCP officials in 2010 and 2016.¹⁵⁰ Of secondary but significant importance is the East China Sea, where CCP officials have reportedly described sovereignty over the disputed Senkaku islands as a core interest.¹⁵¹ Of the far seas, the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) deserves special attention.¹⁵² Chinese media refers to PLA operations in the IOR, particularly operations in the Gulf of Aden, as implementing its “far seas strategy” [远海战略].¹⁵³

IV. Objectives: The Maritime Turn in CCP Grand Strategy

The CCP has three nested objectives pertinent to maritime transformation: 1) achieving “national rejuvenation,” 2) making the PRC a “maritime great power,” and 3) making the PLA a “world-class military.” Under General Secretary Xi Jinping, achieving national rejuvenation is clearly situated as the CCP’s primary objective from which lower objectives particular to

¹⁴⁸ PRC Ministry of Natural Resources, First Institute of Oceanography [自然资源部第一海洋研究所], “Which Seas Comprise China’s Near Seas?” [我国的近海都包括哪些海?], May 4, 2017, <http://www.fio.org.cn/news/7291.htm>; PRC State Council Information Office, *China’s Military Strategy*, May 27, 2015, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm; M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China’s Military Strategy since 1949*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 232.

¹⁴⁹ The CCP designates its nonnegotiable issues “core interests” [核心利益]. While the CCP initially only designated unification with Taiwan as its core interest, the list of these interests has grown to include the South China Sea and other areas. See Michael D. Swaine, “China’s Assertive Behavior Part One: On ‘Core Interests,’” *China Leadership Monitor* 34, February 22, 2011, <https://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/winter-2011>.

¹⁵⁰ *Xinhua*, “PLA navy chief urges China-U.S. cooperation in handling South China Sea,” July 19, 2016, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2016-07/19/content_7162158.htm; Edward Wong, “Chinese Military Seeks to Extend Its Naval Power,” *The New York Times*, April 23, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/24/world/asia/24navy.html>.

¹⁵¹ Caitlin Campbell et al., “China’s ‘Core Interests’ and the East China Sea,” *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, May 10, 2013, <https://www.uscc.gov/research/chinas-core-interests-and-east-china-sea>.

¹⁵² This assessment borrows another net assessment’s definition of the IOR. See Anthony H. Cordesman et al., *The Indian Ocean Region: A Strategic Net Assessment*, August 30, 2014, 1-3, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/indian-ocean-region>.

¹⁵³ See, for example, *Global Times*, “The U.S. claims China will increase its far seas strategic patrols and may deploy its navy to the Indian Ocean” [美称中国将加大远海战略巡逻 或向印度洋出动海军], May 11, 2015, http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2015-05/11/c_127787762.htm; *Sina Military*, “PLAN strategic development has five directions and is certain to become a naval great power over time” [中国海军战略发展方向有 5 点 假以时日必将成为海军强国], January 19, 2019, <https://jmqmil.sina.cn/ifeng/doc-ifyqtycx0370668.d.html?oid=36&vt=4>.

implementing entities are derived.¹⁵⁴ Attending to national rejuvenation are supporting national- or ministry-level objectives, such as building the PRC into a “maritime great power” [海洋强国], which in turn requires the PLA, particularly the PLAN, to become a “world-class military” [世界一流军队] underpinning the CCP’s maritime power.¹⁵⁵ As will be demonstrated, the process by which the CCP’s approach to national rejuvenation has increasingly incorporated maritime goals, including the objective of building the PRC into a maritime great power, constitutes PRC maritime transformation. This section offers a diachronic description of the plans and strategies that Chinese policymakers and military leaders have put into place to identify and realize these objectives.

CCP Grand Strategy: Resolving Contradictions Toward National Rejuvenation

This thesis defines strategy as how an actor arrays its resources in space and time to achieve its aims against its competitors.¹⁵⁶ What makes strategy a grand strategy is the addition of a third variable: scale.¹⁵⁷ When the scope of the actor’s competition grows to a scale at which an individual mind “would ordinarily miss or would perceive only after long study and reflection” the nature and outcome of the contest’s motions, it is grand.¹⁵⁸ Yet competition is a dynamic process, and the inherently competitive element of a grand strategy precludes time-consuming study and reflection before taking action. As such, a grand strategy cannot be a long-considered, detailed plan with a rigid formulation of ends, ways, and means. Rather, grand

¹⁵⁴ Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era [习近平：决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告], (speech, Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017), http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm.

¹⁵⁵ *Xinhua*, “Xi Jinping: Building a strong modern navy will provide strong support for realizing the Chinese dream of a strong military [习近平：努力建设一支强大的现代化海军 为实现中国梦强军梦提供坚强力量支撑],” May 24, 2017, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-05/24/content_5196520.htm.

¹⁵⁶ I am grateful to Tom Mahnken for this definition.

¹⁵⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), 21.

¹⁵⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), 201; Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 102.

strategy is a coherent conceptual framework that clarifies an actor-of-scale's competitive ambitions, remains flexibly tethered to changing operational realities, and proves robust to uncertainty over time. It is “the intellectual architecture that gives form and structure” to competitive policy, but it is not the policy itself.¹⁵⁹

The CCP's bid for national rejuvenation is a grand strategic objective. While “national rejuvenation” is modern terminology for a flexible conceptual framework which has been varyingly named over time, the consistent defining theme of CCP top-level policymaking is of aggrandizing the PRC in opposition to identified adversaries—particularly the United States.¹⁶⁰ Across the scale of competing states, these objectives, paired against designated opponents, became what is now recognizable as a CCP grand strategy of national rejuvenation.¹⁶¹

Chinese state media authoritatively describes the PRC as from its 1949 inception consistently opposed to behaviors it perceived as U.S. imperialism.¹⁶² This top-level strategic concept offered an objective to achieve as well as an opponent against whom to achieve it. In 1949, then soon-to-be Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai articulated the CCP's chief objective as reclaiming once-controlled territories lost in war, such as Tibet and Taiwan, together into a

¹⁵⁹ Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 3.

¹⁶⁰ For an analysis of varying CCP approaches toward an ultimate objective of national rejuvenation, see Avery Goldstein, “China's Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping,” *International Security* 45, no. 1, (2020), 165-201, 165, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00383.

¹⁶¹ For a brief overview of existing literature on CCP grand strategy, see Andrew Scobell et al., *China's Grand Strategy: Trends, Trajectories, and Long-Term Competition*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2020), 9-11, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2700/RR2798/RAND_RR2798.pdf.

¹⁶² *Xinhua*, “The Evolution of Mao Zedong's International Strategic Thought” [毛泽东国际战略思想的演变], December 19, 2013, http://www.china.com.cn/guoqing/mzd120/2013-12/19/content_30944303_3.htm. Beijing's perspective of the United States as presented here is not simple propaganda. The CCP's perspective of the United States has been shaped around the image of the United States military as an existential threat looming behind China's neighbors. From the CCP's perspective, U.S. imperial interests against the CCP manifested in war on the Korean Peninsula just one year after the PRC's founding, in Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries, and in the Taiwan Strait on multiple occasions. The CCP perceives these conflicts as asymmetric, with CCP defending core interests on its borders while the United States, fighting an expeditionary war, waged war for imperialist and hegemonic interests. See Paul H.B. Godwin and Alice L. Miller, *China's Forbearance Has Limits: Chinese Threat and Retaliation Signaling and Its Implications for a Sino-American Military Confrontation*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2013), 25, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/Article/717729/chinas-forbearance-has-limits-chinese-threat-and-retaliation-signaling-and-its/>. For a detailed analysis of Chinese perspectives of the United States as an imperial power, see David Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America, 1972-1990*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

single “China,” a statement of national invention which overlays the imported idea of a nation-state over a militarily unified territory.¹⁶³ CCP Chairman Mao Zedong identified the United States as the CCP’s key opponent in its national invention when he used Marxist-Leninist terminology¹⁶⁴ to label the United States to be the PRC’s “principal contradiction” [主要矛盾].¹⁶⁵ This intellectual architecture guided CCP foreign policy, including shaping Mao’s decision to enter the Korean War to secure a military buffer against the United States, until the principal contradiction changed again.¹⁶⁶ In the 1970s, worsening Sino-Soviet relations, culminating in what the CCP considered Soviet invasions into Chinese territory, made the United States the PRC’s “secondary contradiction” [次要矛盾] relative to the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁷ This was a shift in emphasis, not strategy: at no point did the CCP adopt an approach which was not competitive or not competitive against the United States. So long as CCP national policy continues to pursue a comprehensive objective such as national rejuvenation against an opponent such as one designated in its principal contradiction, the CCP is prosecuting a grand strategy.

The most recent versions of the CCP’s principal contradictions, revised in 1981 and 2017, continued to indicate CCP pursuit of national rejuvenation against an American

¹⁶³ Sulmaan Wasif Khan, *Haunted by Chaos: China’s Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 38-40. On the strategic imperative for territorial reunification, also see Allen S. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), 4-5. The topic of Chinese national invention as presented here is explored in detail by Bill Hayton, *The Invention of China*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020); and Chalmers A. Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China 1937-1945*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962).

¹⁶⁴ Mao Zedong uses the Marxist-Leninist terminology of contradictions to refer to ubiquitous matters which must be resolved in the interrelation of things, in so doing realizing objective scientific progress. According to Mao, there is only ever one “principal contradiction,” with an outsized role in the interrelation of things, to which other contradictions are subordinate. Marxist-Leninist theory in CCP thought will be discussed in greater detail in the section “Toward Naked Ambition, 2014 to Present.” See Mao Zedong, “On Contradiction” [矛盾论], August 1937, <http://staff.ustc.edu.cn/~zuojin/arts/MPRC-MDE-193708147.pdf>.

¹⁶⁵ *Xinhua*, “The Evolution of Mao Zedong’s International Strategic Thought” [毛泽东国际战略思想的演变], December 19, 2013, http://www.china.com.cn/guoqing/mzd120/2013-12/19/content_30944303_3.htm.

¹⁶⁶ Sulmaan Wasif Khan, *Haunted by Chaos: China’s Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 60 & 72; *Xinhua*, “The Evolution of Mao Zedong’s International Strategic Thought” [毛泽东国际战略思想的演变], December 19, 2013, http://www.china.com.cn/guoqing/mzd120/2013-12/19/content_30944303_3.htm.

¹⁶⁷ *Xinhua*, “The Evolution of Mao Zedong’s International Strategic Thought” [毛泽东国际战略思想的演变], December 19, 2013, http://www.china.com.cn/guoqing/mzd120/2013-12/19/content_30944303_3.htm; Flynt Leverett and Wu Bingbing, “The New Silk Road and China’s Evolving Grand Strategy,” *The China Journal* 77 (January 2017), 110-132, 114, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/689684>.

antagonist.¹⁶⁸ While these revised contradictions focused on economic development and are not as obviously competitive as prior indicators involving military threat, the CCP's transient prioritization of economic development belied enduring CCP interests in international competition which carry military risk. During the 1981 revision, the perspective that the United States was in decline dominated CCP discourse, leading CCP leaders to conclude that an insular focus on PRC economic development would be how the PRC would catch up with the developed economies of the world and, implicitly, restore China to great power status—in modern terminology, achieve national rejuvenation.¹⁶⁹ Notably, even as the CCP in the 1980s continued to consider economically catching up to the United States a distant objective, it nevertheless benchmarked its progress against the United States economy, implicitly targeting American power in the CCP's explicit goals to “catch up and surpass” the economies of developed countries.¹⁷⁰ The CCP's designation of seemingly non-confrontational economic principal contradictions enabled the PRC to build economic foundations for strategic competition without appearing to do so, and CCP propagandists sought to preserve that advantage with narratives of “China's peaceful rise” or “peaceful development” while castigating any concerns of analysts in the United States and elsewhere as “China threat theory.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ The principal contradiction that the CCP announced in 1981 was one between growing public demand for material and cultural goods against the PRC's “backward social production.” The 2017 announcement, given in Xi Jinping's Party Congress Work report, was one of slow and unbalanced economic development. *Xinhua*, “Xinhua Insight: China embraces new ‘principal contradiction’ when embarking on new journey,” October 20, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/20/c_136694592.htm; Stephen Roach, “China's Contradictions,” *China-U.S. Focus*, October 23, 2017, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/society-culture/chinas-contradictions>.

¹⁶⁹ On catching up to the developed economies of the world, see Research on the History of the Chinese Communist Party [中共党史研究], “A Comparative Study on Mao Zedong's and Deng Xiaoping's Approach to Governing China” [毛泽东、邓小平治国方略比较研究], *People's Daily*, November 26, 2013, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2013/1126/c69113-23656835-3.html>; on Chinese perspectives of U.S. decline, see David M. Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders its National Security: “The Great Peace and Development Debate of 1999,”* CNA Memorandum D0014464.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, December 2000); Bonnie S. Glaser and Lyle Morris, “Chinese Perceptions of U.S. Decline and Power,” *China Brief*, July 9, 2009, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinese-perceptions-of-u-s-decline-and-power/>.

¹⁷⁰ Barry Naughton, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on The Chinese View of Strategic Competition with the United States, June 24, 2020, 1, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/Naughton_Testimony.pdf.

¹⁷¹ On the “peaceful rise” narrative, see Robert L. Suettinger, “The Rise and Descent of ‘Peaceful Rise,’” *China Leadership Monitor* 12, October 30, 2004, https://media.hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/clm12_rs.pdf; Esther Pan, “The Promise and Pitfalls of China's ‘Peaceful Rise,’” *Council on Foreign Relations*, April 14, 2006, <https://www.cfr.org/background/promise-and-pitfalls-chinas-peaceful-rise>; Wang Jisi, “China in the Middle,” *The*

The CCP has a grand strategy. Its ambitions for national rejuvenation and competitive perspective against the United States form a coherent intellectual architecture spanning space, time, and scale, from which the PRC's national- and ministry-level competitive policies are derived. Like all grand strategies, the CCP's is consistent in intellectual frame-working and flexible in approach in the way necessary to respond to a dynamic world.¹⁷² While competitive elements targeting the United States have been present in CCP strategy and policy since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the post-Cold War incarnation of strategic competition began in ideation around 1993 and in earnest after 1999. The following section overviews three shifts in the CCP's approach to its grand strategy of rejuvenation: 1) a turn toward actively prosecuting strategic competition from 1993–1999, 2) trends toward increasing international leadership from 2000–2013, and 3) the modern era of the CCP's naked ambition beginning in 2014. The section is summarized in Table 2 below.

American Interest, February 2, 2015, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/02/02/china-in-the-middle/>. On the "China threat theory" narrative, see David Lai, *The United States and China in Power Transition* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011), 50-57, <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/2166.pdf>.

¹⁷² John Lewis Gaddis details one such example with various U.S. approaches to implementing the common intellectual framework of containment during the Cold War. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*, (1982; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Table 2: CCP Grand Strategic Shifts, 1993–2020

	Change in CCP guiding ideology	Revised CCP security assessment	Revised CCP policy
Shift 1: 1993–1999	“Peace and development” → “Peace and development” in a “period of strategic opportunity”	The United States will not decline precipitously and will continue to be a threat to CCP interests for decades	Concerted effort to build capabilities in an unannounced competition against the United States during a period of strategic opportunity
Shift 2: 2000–2013	“Hide and bide” plus “make a difference” → “Strive for achievement”	The PRC economic model contrasts unexpectedly favorably against that of liberal democracies	Growing but still-restrained interest in an international leadership role
Shift 3: 2014–Present (ongoing)	“Strive for achievement” → “Strive for achievement” plus “profound changes unseen in a century”	Growing USG-CCP tensions may be closing the period of strategic opportunity	Open advocacy for the CCP to lead a global effort to replace U.S.-led alliances with a new global security architecture

Prelude: Toward Strategic Opportunity, 1993 to 1999

The CCP’s first grand strategic shift, completed in 1999, was one which recharacterized the threat it faced from the United States. In 1993, CCP leaders released official speeches and guidance that once again identified the United States as its primary strategic adversary on its path to national rejuvenation. This determination was a response to CCP perceptions of converging trends in the global balance of power, which CCP leaders believe positioned them well to begin a concerted long-term competition against the United States in pursuit of national rejuvenation. The CCP’s decisions reflected three of its perceptions: 1) a sharp reduction in the Soviet Union’s threat to PRC territory and to the CCP regime, 2) an important but nonurgent increase in the United States’ threat to CCP long-term interests, and 3) a long-term trend of decline for U.S. power.

From the CCP's perspective, developments in the 1980s began a broad and enduring trend of easing security pressures on Beijing. In a series of meetings from May through July 1985, the Central Military Commission including paramount leader Deng Xiaoping determined that the intensity of bilateral U.S.-USSR military competition made the Soviet Union no longer likely to invade China, and as such, the CCP could plan long-term policy that did not need to account for total war.¹⁷³ The following year, Chinese officials began announcing another assessment that both the Soviet Union and the United States were in the midst of long-term decline and that a multipolar international structure was emerging in the space once dominated by the two states' military competition.¹⁷⁴ The year after that, the CCP formally adopted Deng's *tifa* [提法]¹⁷⁵ which assessed that "peace and development are the themes of the times" [和平与发展是当代世界的主题] would characterize the CCP's experience for several years to come.¹⁷⁶ This *tifa* expresses a fundamental strategic assessment that the CCP enjoys a low threat of war and as such would be able to dedicate its efforts toward economic development for at least two decades.¹⁷⁷ Deng first proposed this assessment at the Third Plenary Session of the CCP

¹⁷³ M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 174-176; Paul H.B. Godwin, "Change and Continuity in Chinese Military Doctrine: 1949-1999," in *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience Since 1949*, eds. Mark A. Ryan, David M. Finkelstien, and Michael A. McDevitt, (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 40.

¹⁷⁴ Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2000), 9-12.

¹⁷⁵ *Tifa* 提法 are carefully-deployed, official phrases in CCP lexicon which indicate the CCP's policy priorities and direct public discourse. They are one of the most visible parts of the CCP dialectical consensus-building process, with the frequency of the term's use in official media and CCP leader speeches indicating the influence of the policy or approach the *tifa* signifies. See Qian Gang, "Watchwords: the Life of the Party," *China Media Project*, September 10, 2012, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2012/09/10/watchwords-the-life-of-the-party/>; Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 100-101.

¹⁷⁶ Yang Jiechi, "Advancing China's Major-Country Diplomacy Under the Guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Foreign Affairs," *Qiushi* 11, no. 4, iss. 41, (October-December 2019), http://english.qstheory.cn/2020-01/13/c_1125443556.htm; Xi Jieren [奚洁人], "Peace and Development" [和平与发展], *Encyclopedia of the Scientific Outlook on Development* 《科学发展观百科辞典》, (Shanghai, Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 2007), <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/134999/135000/8109704.html>.

¹⁷⁷ Xi Jieren [奚洁人], "Peace and Development" [和平与发展], *Encyclopedia of the Scientific Outlook on Development* 《科学发展观百科辞典》, (Shanghai, Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 2007), <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/134999/135000/8109704.html>; David M. Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders its National Security: "The Great Peace and Development Debate of 1999"*, CNA Memorandum D0014464.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, December 2000), 8.

Central Committee in 1978, and he continued publicly giving this assessment until it was formally adopted by the Party at the 13th National Party Congress in 1987.¹⁷⁸

The converging trends underpinning the “peace and development” assessment began to fray in the early 1990s. The Soviet Union’s 1991 collapse removed the military threat on China’s northern border but also upended the careful bipolar detente on which the CCP’s peaceful assessment rested.¹⁷⁹ The CCP’s official postmortem on USSR collapse also identified political factors, including a U.S. strategy of “peaceful evolution” to force regime change in countries under Communist Party rule, as a new threat the United States posed to the CCP.¹⁸⁰ Further tilting the global balance of power, the U.S. military’s performance in the Gulf War struck PLA researchers as the beginnings of a revolution in military affairs (RMA) [军事革命],¹⁸¹ or a significant shift in the nature of warfare which affects how future wars are likely to be fought.¹⁸²

Mounting CCP perceptions of the United States as a threat were significant enough to return the United States to primary competitor status in CCP strategy but, despite measured dissent among CCP leaders, did not change the official CCP position that the U.S. remains in decline. Two of General Secretary Jiang Zemin’s 1993 speeches show the CCP’s relative

¹⁷⁸ Yang Jiechi, “Advancing China’s Major-Country Diplomacy Under the Guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Foreign Affairs,” *Qiushi* 11, no. 4, iss. 41, (October-December 2019), http://english.qstheory.cn/2020-01/13/c_1125443556.htm; Xi Jieren [奚洁人], “Peace and Development” [和平与发展], *Encyclopedia of the Scientific Outlook on Development* 《科学发展观百科全书》, (Shanghai, Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 2007), <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/134999/135000/8109704.html>.

¹⁷⁹ Ashley J. Tellis, “Pursuing Global Reach: China’s Not So Long March toward Preeminence,” in *Strategic Asia 2019: China’s Expanding Strategic Ambitions*, eds. Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills, (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2019), 12.

¹⁸⁰ Although the official postmortem was not published until 2004, accusations of U.S. efforts at regime change through “peaceful evolution” pervaded CCP and PRC discourse before the USSR’s official collapse. See David Shambaugh, *China’s Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation*, (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008), 48 & 60-69.

¹⁸¹ The RMA, which is varyingly defined but consistently regards a fundamental shift in how modern warfare will be conducted, originated as a Soviet idea which has become a salient strategic planning concept in U.S. and PLA defense establishments. See You Ji, “The Revolution in Military Affairs and the Evolution of China’s Strategic Thinking,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 21, no. 3 (December 1999), 344-364, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25798464>.

¹⁸² Li Chenggang [李成刚], “1990/1991 Gulf War Review” (1990/1991 海湾战争回顾), China Online News Center [中国互联网新闻中心], March 17, 2003, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040204004828/http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/zhuanli/294649.htm>; M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China’s Military Strategy since 1949*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 187-191.

ambivalence about the new opponent it designated. The first, delivered to PRC diplomats stationed abroad, noted that the USG-CCP diplomatic relationship will be one of “struggle and compromise.”¹⁸³ Jiang echoes Mao’s identification of the United States as the CCP’s principal contradiction by using this speech to label the United States as the CCP’s “principal adversary in foreign affairs for a long time to come,” suggesting this adversity cannot end so long as the United States holds a globally preponderant position.¹⁸⁴ All the same, Jiang notes that the United States’ prosecution of a global strategy creates economic demands such that the United States has no choice but to cooperate with the CCP in order to access the PRC’s markets.¹⁸⁵ In Jiang’s telling, the same global stature which brings the United States into systemic competition and conflict with the PRC also fosters American dependence on Chinese markets, giving the CCP an outsized advantage in the competition.

Jiang’s other 1993 speech, which provided the PLA with guidance as it adopted a new military strategy, offered an equally optimistic military analysis. According to Jiang, despite deepening issues between and within Western countries that worked contrary to global peace, the PRC in 1993 was enjoying the “best” regional security environment since the founding of the People’s Republic.¹⁸⁶ While the CCP faced few current security threats, Jiang emphasized an emerging threat to CCP long-term ambitions in delivering his assessment that “hegemonism and power politics have become major obstacles to world peace and development,” using the

¹⁸³ “既要有斗争也要有妥协” See Jiang Zemin, “Diplomatic work must unwaveringly safeguard the highest interests of the country and the nation” [外交工作要坚定不移地维护国家和民族的最高利益], (speech, at the 8th Meeting of Chinese Diplomatic Envoys to Foreign Countries, July 12, 1993), <http://www.reformdata.org/1993/0712/5626.shtml>.

¹⁸⁴ “在今后一个较长时期内，美国仍是我们外交上打交道的主要对手” Jiang Zemin, “Diplomatic work must unwaveringly safeguard the highest interests of the country and the nation” [外交工作要坚定不移地维护国家和民族的最高利益], (speech, at the 8th Meeting of Chinese Diplomatic Envoys to Foreign Countries, July 12, 1993), <http://www.reformdata.org/1993/0712/5626.shtml>.

¹⁸⁵ “美国出于自身全球战略和实际经济利益的考虑，着眼于我国的巨大市场，又不得不在国际事务中寻求同我国合作，需要同我国保持正常关系，以便发展经贸合作。” Jiang Zemin, “Diplomatic work must unwaveringly safeguard the highest interests of the country and the nation” [外交工作要坚定不移地维护国家和民族的最高利益], (speech, at the 8th Meeting of Chinese Diplomatic Envoys to Foreign Countries, July 12, 1993), <http://www.reformdata.org/1993/0712/5626.shtml>.

¹⁸⁶ “我国周边安全环境不断得到改善，同周边国家的睦邻友好关系处于建国以来最好的时期” Jiang Zemin, “The International Situation and Military Strategic Guidelines” [国际形势和军事战略方针], (speech, before a meeting of the expanded Central Military Commission, January 13, 1993), <http://www.reformdata.org/1993/0113/5616.shtml>.

common Chinese pejoratives to refer to U.S. global presence and policy.¹⁸⁷ This speech framed the introduction of new military strategic guidelines which reoriented the PLA toward war under “high-technology conditions,” reflecting the perceived RMA unveiled in the 1991 Gulf War, but also saw any potential conflict with the United States as a distant future possibility which would be deterred by economic interdependence, especially as the U.S. declines and a multipolar structure arises.¹⁸⁸

Speaking before the CCP’s diplomatic and military bureaucracies in 1993, Jiang issued policy guidance which revealed the CCP’s revised outlook as one which recognized the United States as the CCP’s principal strategic adversary. The assessment he offered was tempered by faith in U.S. decline, ultimately producing a grand strategy of nonurgent competition against the United States, in which rising military threats from a U.S. RMA are overtaken by economic interdependence, which only becomes more restrictive on U.S. policy decisions as the United States continues to decline.

The CCP’s grand strategic approach of nonurgent competition, as well as Deng Xiaoping’s “peace and development” *tifa* underpinning it, came under fire in 1999. The CCP’s formal adoption of this *tifa* in 1987 ran roughshod over meaningful dissent among Party leadership, and elements of the CCP continued to doubt whether the “peace and development” assessment was accurate in its displacement of previous paramount leader Mao Zedong’s earlier *tifa*: that the international security environment was one of “war and revolution,” [战争与革命] and the CCP needed to prepare for near-term war with the United States and the Soviet

¹⁸⁷ “霸权主义和强权政治已成为世界和平与发展的主要障碍。” Jiang Zemin, “The International Situation and Military Strategic Guidelines” [国际形势和军事战略方针], (speech, before a meeting of the expanded Central Military Commission, January 13, 1993), <http://www.reformdata.org/1993/0113/5616.shtml>. On “hegemonism” and “power politics” as codewords for the United States in Chinese discourse, see Wang Jisi, “Multipolarity Versus Hegemonism: Chinese Views of International Politics,” *China Institute of Strategy and Management* [中国战略与管理研究会], September 28, 2008, <http://www.cssm.org.cn/view.php?id=21083>; Wang Jisi, “China’s Search for Stability with America,” *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (2005), 39-48.

¹⁸⁸ M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China’s Military Strategy since 1949*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 183-185 & 200-201.

Union.¹⁸⁹ In 1999, a series of foreign policy disasters for the CCP, including closer U.S.-Japan ties on theater missile defense, renewed threats of Taiwan independence, and NATO intervention in Kosovo involving the inadvertent bombing of the PRC embassy, catalyzed quiet but longstanding doubts about “peace and development” within parts of CCP central leadership.¹⁹⁰ The ensuing debate forced the CCP to reassess its official assessment of the international situation and was only resolved with a revision in CCP grand strategy.

Although the debate’s proceedings remain unclear, Jiang Zemin definitively settled the debate between August and September 1999 by promulgating a new analytic Party “line” upholding “peace and development” as the overriding trend of the times, though tempering that finding with three new findings: “hegemonism and power politics are on the rise, the trend toward military interventionism is increasing, and the gap between developed and developing countries is increasing.”¹⁹¹ These three findings describe the United States as a global hegemon that destabilizes the world with military intervention. While proponents of the “peace and development” *tifa* and the apparent shapers of CCP grand strategy in 1993 perceived the United States as in decline and therefore not a threat to their long-term ambitions, the new findings determined the United States would remain a hegemon able to threaten CCP interests for another two decades, and the CCP would need to prepare for bilateral competition as it developed. The findings did not reflect the assessment of the “war and revolution” *tifa* that a U.S.-PRC war was either imminent or unavoidable, but they did reveal sharply increased CCP suspicions of U.S. intentions. To account for this instability, the CCP pursued internal and external balancing strategies, investing heavily in the PLA while pursuing closer ties with

¹⁸⁹ David M. Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders its National Security: “The Great Peace and Development Debate of 1999,”* CNA Memorandum D0014464.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, December 2000).

¹⁹⁰ David M. Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders its National Security: “The Great Peace and Development Debate of 1999,”* CNA Memorandum D0014464.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, December 2000), 12-14.

¹⁹¹ David M. Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders its National Security: “The Great Peace and Development Debate of 1999,”* CNA Memorandum D0014464.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, December 2000), 22.

Russia.¹⁹² A revised grand strategy responding to perceived near-term threats from the United States was in place.

The year following, Jiang Zemin delivered a Party Congress Work Report announcing that the PRC was enjoying a “period of strategic opportunity,” [战略机遇期] in which the PRC, enjoying a stable security environment while the United States was embroiled in conflicts outside East Asia, would be able to invest in domestic reforms without needing to expend significant resources deterring U.S. military activity on its periphery.¹⁹³ While Jiang had made a similar announcement in his 1993 speech, and although discussions of the period of strategic opportunity commonly focus on economic development, the strategic imperatives emerging from the 1999 debate between Mao’s “war and revolution” and Deng’s “peace and development” make clear that the period is “strategic” insofar as it is an opportunity for the PRC to develop capabilities necessary to compete against perceived U.S. hegemonic activity and military intervention.¹⁹⁴

Toward Striving for Achievement, 2000 to 2013

The CCP’s second grand strategic shift since renaming the United States as its primary strategic opponent was the result of another debate over Deng’s *tifa: taoguang yanghui* [韬光养晦], commonly translated as “hide your capabilities and bide your time,” or simply “hide and bide.” Notably, the object of the “hide and bide” debate was not relitigating the determination of the 1999 debate. While the earlier debate, between “war and revolution” and “peace and development” was about accurately assessing the external threat facing the CCP, the debate

¹⁹² David M. Finkelstein, *China Reconsiders its National Security: “The Great Peace and Development Debate of 1999,”* CNA Memorandum D0014464.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, December 2000), 25-30.

¹⁹³ Jiang Zemin, “Build a Well-off Society in an All-Round Way and Create a New Situation in Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” [全面建设小康社会，开创中国特色社会主义事业新局面], (speech, Sixteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, November 8, 2002), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/zyjh_674906/t10855.shtml.

¹⁹⁴ PRC Embassy in the United States, “Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi on Making Good Use of the Important Period of Strategic Opportunities and Steadily Opening up New Dimensions in China’s Diplomacy,” March 7, 2011, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zgyw/t807598.htm>.

over “hide and bide” regarded the PRC’s power and how the CCP should respond to its external threat as that power grows.

“Hide and bide” is a *tifa* reflecting a long running trend in Chinese foreign policy of predicating foreign policy interactions on the CCP assessment of the parties’ power relationship.¹⁹⁵ While all diplomats of any country are likely to be aware of power dynamics at play in the international negotiations they join, the official Chinese approach to this assessment and how they permit negotiations to proceed afterward is distinctively formulaic.¹⁹⁶ The CCP’s assessment of the USG-PRC power relationship produced the defining logic of the “hide and bide” approach: relative to the United States, the PRC was weak. As such, Deng Xiaoping in 1992 articulated a policy guidance that included a literary reference to a Qing Dynasty-era work, which became the now-famous *tifa*: “Only by hiding our capabilities and biding our time for several years can we become a true political power, and the PRC’s international pronouncements will carry a distinct weight. After we become more capable, we must improve our science and technology, national defense, and cutting-edge weaponry.”¹⁹⁷ Accurately assessing the CCP as having ambitions which outstrip the PRC’s capabilities, Deng emphasized that with the “hide and bide” approach, the PRC must also eschew any

¹⁹⁵ Yang Jiechi, then PRC Foreign Minister and now State Councilor, revealed the extent of this mentality in a 2010 meeting with Southeast Asian countries when he said, “China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that’s just a fact,” reportedly demanding deference from the Singaporean foreign minister. John Pomfret, “U.S. takes a tougher tone with China,” *Washington Post*, Friday, July 30, 2010, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/29/AR2010072906416.html>.

¹⁹⁶ David Lampton describes four negotiation positions Chinese diplomats use pursuant to their assessment of the power relationship: 1) the PRC as the stronger country, in which its interlocutor has little leverage to shape CCP decisions, 2) the PRC as the weaker country, in which the interlocutor is morally obligated to assist or defer, 3) the PRC as likely to be in the stronger position in the future, in which negotiations are likely to be delayed until then, and 4) a reciprocal relationship in which both parties are mutually codependent. See David Lampton, *Following the Leader: Ruling China, from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 201-204.

¹⁹⁷ “韬光养晦地干些年，才能真正形成一个较大的政治力量，中国在国际上发言的分量就会不同。有能力的时候，要提高科技国防尖端武器。” Leng Rong [冷溶] and Wang Zuoling [汪作玲], eds. *Chronological Record of Deng Xiaoping’s Life, 1975-1997 [邓小平年谱, 1975-1997]* vol. 2, (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2004), 1346; Chen Dingding and Wang Jianwei, “Lying Low No More? China’s New Thinking on the *Tao Guang Yang Hui* Strategy,” *China: An International Journal* 9, no. 2 (2011), 195-216, 197. On the literary origins of 韬光养晦 “hide and bide,” see Zhu Weilie [朱威烈], “Hide and Bide: An Idea Common to World Civilizations,” [韬光养晦:世界主流文明的共有观念 朱威烈在上海国际问题研究院的演讲] (speech, Shanghai Institute of International Studies, August 18, 2010), <https://www.sinoss.net/2010/0818/24916.html>.

international leadership role and avoid the costs thereof, ensuring the CCP has the flexibility to exploit any opportunities, as they arise, to become an international political power.¹⁹⁸ “Hide and bide” is necessarily competitive and suggests deception for strategic ends. As leading Chinese professors Chen Dingding and Wang Jianwei write, “it cannot be denied that the term [hide and bide] connotes trick and conspiracy in traditional Chinese culture.”¹⁹⁹

Jiang Zemin indicated his acceptance of a modification of the “hide and bide” approach in 1995 by pairing it with a second phrase: *yousuo zuowei* [有所作为], a reference to the writings of Mencius, commonly translated “make a difference.”²⁰⁰ The added phrase connotes only modest ambitions, and Jiang offered this modification to “hide and bide” as a compromise, expressing that pairing “hide and bide” with “make a difference” reaffirmed the CCP behind Deng’s assessment of the international situation while loosening its restraints in the event the CCP finds immediate action more advantageous than hiding and biding.²⁰¹ The resolution of the “peace and development” debate of 1999 and Jiang’s subsequent “period of strategic opportunity” only reinforced the prudence of “hide and bide” as the default Chinese foreign policy position, urging restraint in dealing with an adversary that CCP leaders now believe will wield hegemonic power for decades.

The 2008 global financial crisis sparked a second grand strategic debate within the CCP as some Party members, seeing U.S. economic fallout during the crisis, began to question whether “hide and bide” was still the correct approach to PRC foreign policy. Shortly after the crisis’ outbreak in September 2008, PRC state media began messaging that the crisis is a step

¹⁹⁸ Liu Huaqiu [刘华秋], “Essentials of Deng Xiaoping’s Strategic Thought (2)” [邓小平国际战略思想论要 (2)], *People’s Daily*, April 17, 2007, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/68742/69115/69120/5623685.html>.

¹⁹⁹ Chen Dingding and Wang Jianwei, “Lying Low No More? China’s New Thinking on the *Tao Guang Yang Hui* Strategy,” *China: An International Journal* 9, no. 2 (2011), 195-216, 202.

²⁰⁰ Chen Dingding and Wang Jianwei, “Lying Low No More? China’s New Thinking on the *Tao Guang Yang Hui* Strategy,” *China: An International Journal* 9, no. 2 (2011), 195-216, 197-198; Zhu Weilie [朱威烈], “Hide and Bide: An Idea Common to World Civilizations,” (speech, Shanghai Institute of International Studies, August 18, 2010), <https://www.sinoss.net/2010/0818/24916.html>.

²⁰¹ Zhu Weilie [朱威烈], “Hide and Bide: An Idea Common to World Civilizations,” (speech, Shanghai Institute of International Studies, August 18, 2010), <https://www.sinoss.net/2010/0818/24916.html>.

in the global trend toward multipolarity, as Deng predicted in his initial assessment of “peace and development” being the theme of the times, and that the PRC’s international stature is increasing in the midst of the crisis.²⁰² Beginning one or two years after the effects of the crisis had subsided in the PRC, state media narratives emphasize the PRC’s increased significance in continuing to guide the global economy.²⁰³

CCP narratives of the PRC’s growing importance in the economic affairs of an increasingly multipolar world were simultaneously critical of U.S. political systems and the extent of American influence. Western analysts partially affirmed this impression with renewed interest in a possible “Beijing Consensus” by which developing countries align their economic policies with the PRC-inspired state control rather than the free markets and democratic elections which characterized the reportedly now-tarnished “Washington Consensus.”²⁰⁴ Liu He, who in 2008 served as the Deputy Director of the Office of the Central Leading Group for Financial and Economic Work [中央财经领导小组办公室] and has been a leading voice on PRC economic policy since his elevation to the Politburo in 2017, brought intellectual rigor to the disadvantages of liberal democracies and relative benefits of the CCP’s approach to resolving the financial crisis.²⁰⁵ Writing in a postmortem lauded by Harvard professors Graham Allison and Larry

²⁰² See, for example, Wang Zaibang [王在邦], “Expert Commentary: Adjustment and Shock Highlight the Global Trend of Multipolarization” [专家点评：调整震荡凸显全球多极化趋势], *Xinhua*, December 25, 2008, <https://jixi.dbw.cn/system/2008/12/25/051673888.shtml>; Song Zhenyuan [宋振远], Li Keyong [李柯勇], and Tian Yu [田雨], “Xinhua Perspective: China’s Response to the Global Financial Crisis Seizes on the Period of Strategic Opportunity” [新华视点：中国在应对金融危机中把握战略机遇期], December 15, 2008, http://www.gov.cn/ztl/2008-12/15/content_1178273.htm.

²⁰³ Qiao Jihong [乔继红], “Economic Observation: Structure of World Economy Changing After Global Financial Crisis” [经济观察：金融危机下的世界经济格局变迁], *Xinhua*, September 21, 2009, <https://business.sohu.com/20090921/n266888012.shtml>; Ming Jinwei [明金维] and Liu Ying [刘颖], “Xinhua News Agency: Chinese Affairs, Worldwide Influence: The Global Importance of China’s Economic Direction” [新华社：中国事 世界势——中国经济走向的全球意义], *Xinhua*, December 15, 2010, <http://www.china-embassy.org/chn/gdxw/t778529.htm>; Zha Wenye [查文晔], Wang Jianhua [王建华], and Liu Huan [刘欢], “Xinhua News Agency: Power and Interdependence: China and the World Build New Economic Ties” [新华社：权力与相互依赖：中国和世界构建新型经济关系], December 13, 2010, <http://www.china-embassy.org/chn/gdxw/t778009.htm>.

²⁰⁴ Daniel W. Drezner, “Perception, Misperception, and Sensitivity: Chinese Economic Power and Preferences after the 2008 Financial Crisis,” in *Strategic Adjustment and the Rise of China: Power and Politics in East Asia*, eds. Robert S. Ross and Øystein Tunsjø, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 76-77; John Williamson, “Is the ‘Beijing Consensus’ Now Dominant?” *Asia Policy* 13 (2012), 1-16, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/24905162>.

²⁰⁵ For Liu He’s background and policymaking role, see *Brookings Institution*, “Liu He 刘鹤,” March 18, 2018,

Summers, Liu described the 2008 crisis as exacerbated by “inability to reform and election considerations” as “governments tended to resort to populist policy announcements to appease the public” rather than taking decisive steps, as he suggests the CCP did, to stabilize the global financial system.²⁰⁶

Some elements of the CCP, seeing the global financial crisis as the beginnings of a global realignment of power away from the United States, questioned whether the USG-CCP power relationship was the same in 2008 as it was when Deng evaluated it in 1992, also calling into question whether “hide and bide” plus “make a difference” was still the most prudent guidance for PRC foreign policy.²⁰⁷ Recognizing this dispute, CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao attempted to split the difference in a 2009 speech to the PRC’s diplomats stationed abroad, in which he describes “hide and bide” and “make a difference” as a “dialectical unity” [辩证统一] to which he appended two modifiers: “*persist in* hide and bide and *actively* make a difference” [坚持韬光养晦, 积极有所作为] (emphasis added).²⁰⁸

While the text of Hu’s speech seemed to simultaneously elevate both sides of the dialectical unity, Hu was reported to have personally insisted on the “actively” modifier to “make a difference,” suggesting a greater inclination toward the active foreign policy in line with “make

https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/china_20180318_liu_he_profile.pdf; William C. McCahill Jr., “The Chinese Communists’ New Politburo Standing Committee,” *National Bureau of Asian Research*, October 26, 2017, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/the-chinese-communists-new-politburo-standing-committee-more-claque-than-collective-leadership/>.

²⁰⁶ Liu He, “Overcoming the Great Recession: Lessons from China,” Harvard Kennedy School Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government, July 2014, https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/centers/mrcbg/files/summers_foreword_AWP.pdf.

²⁰⁷ Although the debate’s proceedings among CCP leaders are not available to outside analysts, the rise and fall of influence wielded by leading Chinese academics who advocated for greater adherence to or a shift away from “hide and bide” constitute a proxy to the debate unfolding in public. See Yan Xuetong, “From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 2, (2014), 153-184; Qin Yaqing, “Continuity through Change: Background Knowledge and China’s International Strategy,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7, no. 3, (2014), 285-314. For a detailed review of the proxy debate, see Chen Dingding and Wang Jianwei, “Lying Low No More? China’s New Thinking on the *Tao Guang Yang Hui* Strategy,” *China: An International Journal* 9, no. 2 (2011), 195-216, 199-211.

²⁰⁸ Hu Jintao, “Coordinate Planning for the Domestic and International Situations, Improve our Diplomatic Work Capabilities” [统筹国内国际两个大局, 提高外交工作能力水平], (speech, Eleventh Meeting of China’s Diplomatic Envoys to Foreign Countries, July 17, 2009), in *Selected Works of Hu Jintao Vol. 3* 《胡锦涛文选 第三卷》, (Beijing: CPC Central Committee Document Editing Committee [中共中央文献编辑委员会], 2016), 236-238.

a difference” than with continued adherence to “hide and bide.”²⁰⁹ Hu’s other foreign policy initiatives indicated he preferred that the CCP increasingly “make a difference” in the world; in 2006, Hu delivered a speech to the United Nations envisioning a “harmonious world” [和谐世界] which official Party documents describe as an expansive vision advancing a new security concept, reforming the international order, and reshaping norms of interstate behavior in opposition to “hegemonism and power politics,” an indirect but clear criticism of U.S. foreign policy.²¹⁰ While not explicitly departing from Deng’s guidance to never seek international leadership, Hu’s “harmonious world” ambitions suggested growing interest among CCP leaders to take leading roles in international order-reforming and norm-reshaping.²¹¹ Still, Hu’s compromise did not settle the debate, and Chinese partisans toward increased global engagement selectively mixed Deng’s formulation with Hu’s, tacitly advocating for the CCP to “actively make a difference” while making perfunctory reference to the unmodified “hide and bide.”²¹²

The “hide and bide” debate was not resolved until current CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping took power and introduced two of his own policy-guiding phrases: “Chinese Dream” [中国梦] and “strive for achievement” [奋发有为]. Xi’s initial contribution to the discourse was the “Chinese Dream,” a phrase melding Chinese ambitions for “national rejuvenation” with

²⁰⁹ Bonnie S. Glaser and Benjamin Dooley, “China’s 11th Ambassadorial Conference Signals Continuity and Change in Foreign Policy,” *China Brief*, November 4, 2009, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-11th-ambassadorial-conference-signals-continuity-and-change-in-foreign-policy/>; Rush Doshi, “Hu’s to blame for China’s foreign assertiveness?” *Brookings Institution*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/hus-to-blame-for-chinas-foreign-assertiveness/>.

²¹⁰ Hu Jintao, “Strive to Build a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity” [努力建设持久和平、共同繁荣的和谐世界], (speech, Second Plenary Meeting of the 60th Anniversary Summit of the United Nations, September 15, 2005, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/123/wjdt/zyjh/t212359.htm>; Xi Jieren [奚洁人], “Harmonious World Concept” [和谐世界理念], *Encyclopedia of the Scientific Outlook on Development* 《科学发展观百科全书》, (Shanghai, Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House, 2007), <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/134999/135000/8109699.html>.

²¹¹ Zheng Yongnian and Tok Sow Keat, “‘Harmonious Society’ and ‘Harmonious World’: China’s Policy Discourse Under Hu Jintao,” *University of Nottingham China Policy Institute*, October 2007, Par. 4.4, <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/iaps/documents/cpi/briefings/briefing-26-harmonious-society-and-harmonious-world.pdf>.

²¹² For example, see M. Taylor Fravel, “Revising Deng’s Foreign Policy,” *The Diplomat*, January 17, 2012, <https://thediplomat.com/2012/01/revising-dengs-foreign-policy-2/>.

nationalist agitation and which he introduced in a speech given two weeks after his appointment as General Secretary.²¹³ Xi's speech, delivered at what John Pomfret describes as a "deeply xenophobic museum exhibition" called "The Road to Rejuvenation" [复兴之路], emphasized a "Chinese Dream" anchoring the objectives of PRC foreign and domestic policy in deeply-held historic grievances accumulated over 170 years.²¹⁴ The "Chinese Dream" quickly became a CCP guideline around which important policy was organized, with Yang Jiechi leading the elaborations for foreign policy.²¹⁵ Yang, previously the PRC Foreign Minister under Hu Jintao, enjoyed a dramatic elevation in stature in 2013 when he was appointed as a State Councilor and as the Director of the Central Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group, reporting directly to Xi Jinping on all matters of PRC foreign policy. While Yang's early speeches to foreign audiences suggested that the prosperity-focused Chinese Dream was comparable to and compatible with the "American Dream," which he left undefined, he also introduces a tacit competitive edge by pairing the Chinese Dream with "bottom line thinking," [底线思维]²¹⁶ which he describes as "working for the best but preparing for the worst."²¹⁷

²¹³ Li Bin [李斌], "Xi Jinping: Follow the Past and Herald the Future, Forging Ahead to the Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation" [习近平：承前启后 继往开来 继续朝着中华民族伟大复兴目标奋勇前进], *Xinhua*, November 29, 2012, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-11/29/c_113852724.htm.

²¹⁴ John Pomfret, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on The Chinese View of Strategic Competition with the United States, June 24, 2020, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/Pomfret_Testimony.pdf; Li Bin [李斌], "Xi Jinping: Follow the Past and Herald the Future, Forging Ahead to the Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation" [习近平：承前启后 继往开来 继续朝着中华民族伟大复兴目标奋勇前进], *Xinhua*, November 29, 2012, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-11/29/c_113852724.htm.

²¹⁵ Camilla T. N. Sørensen, "The Significance of Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream' for Chinese Foreign Policy: From 'Tao Guang Yang Hui' to 'Fen Fa You Wei'," *Journal of China and International Relations* 3, no. 1 (2015), 53-73, 55-58, <https://doi.org/10.5278/ojs.jcir.v3i1.1146>.

²¹⁶ CCP "bottom line thinking" is much more sinister than Yang presents. While Yang's definition fosters mistrust, analysis from the CCP Party School finds that bottom line thinking also involves readiness to escalate should the CCP anticipate a potential conflict, further describing bottom line thinking as "walking on thin ice" and notes it is a "struggle" in which an actor must be prepared to take preemptive military action. See Xin Ming [辛鸣], "Practice Dialectics and Stick to Bottom Line Thinking" [学习时报：坚持底线思维的辩证法], *Study Times* [学习时报], January 23, 2019, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0123/c40531-30586440.html>.

²¹⁷ Wu Qingcai [吴庆才] and De Yongjian [德永健], "Yang Jiechi: The 'Chinese Dream' and 'American Dream' are Compatible and Bring Out the Best in Each Other" [杨洁篪：“中国梦”与“美国梦”相融相通相得益彰], July 11, 2013, *People's Daily*, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/0711/c40531-22157538.html>; Yang Jiechi, "Implementing the Chinese Dream," *The National Interest*, September 10, 2013, <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/implementing-the-chinese-dream-9026>.

Having established the Chinese Dream and all its grandeur as his policy objective, Xi's foreign policy speeches in 2013 and thereafter abandoned the "hide and bide, make a difference" formulation. Instead, Xi's new formulation, introduced in a speech delivered to PRC diplomats, emphasized "striving to achieve" the CCP's objectives and marked a dramatic shift from the comparatively restrained "actively make a difference" or "hide and bide."²¹⁸ This trend continued in 2014, as Xi's major foreign policy speech to the Central Military Commission included a call to "strive for achievement" in pursuit of "grand rejuvenation" without reference to "hide and bide."²¹⁹ While the *Xinhua* readout of another similarly significant foreign policy speech Xi delivered that year, before the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference, did not specify a reference to "striving for achievement," it does indicate he discussed the Chinese Dream, national rejuvenation, and a charge that Chinese foreign affairs work should advocate for new security concepts and models of great power relations in the world.²²⁰

Xi Jinping effectively settled the CCP debate over whether PRC foreign policy should continue to adhere to Deng's "hide and bide" *tifa* by displacing it entirely with a call to "strive for achievement." Where Hu began measured departures from "hide and bide" by emphasizing "actively make a difference" and proposing a "harmonious world" concept of PRC foreign policy which implied increased PRC leadership in international relations, Xi has entirely cast aside Deng's "hide and bide" guidance and instead called on the CCP's military and foreign service to "strive for achievement" toward a Chinese Dream defined by nationalist fervor.²²¹

²¹⁸ Qian Tong [钱彤], "Xi Jinping: Let the Sense of Community of Common Destiny Take Deep Root in Neighboring Countries" [习近平: 让命运共同体意识在周边国家落地生根], *Xinhua*, October 25, 2013, http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2013-10/25/content_2515764.htm

²¹⁹ Xiehuan Chishie [谢环驰摄], "History Cannot Repeat, But the Future Can Begin, The People United Will Achieve the Great Cause of National Rejuvenation" [习近平: 历史无法重来未来可以开创 万众一心实现民族复兴伟业], *Xinhua*, September 4, 2014, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0904/c64094-25599903.html>.

²²⁰ *Xinhua*, "Xi Jinping Attended the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference and Delivered an Important Speech," 习近平出席中央外事工作会议并发表重要讲话], November 29, 2014, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-11/29/c_1113457723.htm.

²²¹ After Xi's signals in 2013-2014, many English-language analyses on CCP foreign policy began acknowledging the end of "hide and bide" in favor of a more assertive course. See, for example, Anne-Marie Brady, "Chinese Foreign Policy: A New Era Dawns," *The Diplomat*, March 17, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/03/chinese-foreign-policy-a-new-era-dawns/>; Chen Dingding, "Chinese Foreign Policy Needs Major Reform," *The Diplomat*, August 21, 2014,

The CCP's grand strategic debates are parts of a dialectic process with compounding results: In 1993, the CCP determined the United States was once again its primary strategic adversary; in 1999, the CCP determined the United States would remain a dangerous competitor for decades more and that the CCP would need to invest in capabilities to compete; and in 2013, the CCP determined that the USG-PRC power relationship no longer required the CCP to eschew all international leadership positions, freeing the CCP to openly pursue its ambitions. Contiguous through these determinations is a common CCP ambition for greatness and international stature. Thereafter, CCP foreign policy under Xi Jinping has openly pursued a position at the top of a hierarchical global order.

Toward Naked Ambition, 2014 to Present

The CCP's third grand strategic shift since 1993 remains underway as the implications of a CCP "striving to achieve" its objectives in foreign affairs unfolds. While analysts cannot know with certainty what debates may be taking place in Zhongnanhai, reports and several official speeches and documents suggest that CCP leaders, having adopted a posture in direct and largely unvarnished opposition to the United States, are reconsidering whether the intensifying competition with its primary strategic adversary has brought its "period of strategic opportunity" to an end. Likely consideration for CCP leaders may include whether the U.S. response to the CCP's assertive posture following its shift from "hide and bide" to "striving to achieve" is an acceptable cost to the chosen policy, as well as how the CCP should respond.

Arguably the boldest new priority which the CCP under Xi is striving to achieve is the reordering of the Asia-Pacific security environment in direct opposition to U.S. regional influence. Speaking at the fourth Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures

<https://thediplomat.com/2014/08/chinese-foreign-policy-needs-major-reform/>; Tobin Harshaw, "Emperor Xi's China Is Done Biding Its Time," *Bloomberg*, March 3, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-03-03/emperor-xi-s-china-is-done-biding-its-time>; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Annual Report to Congress*, November 2018, 161-162, <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/2018%20Annual%20Report%20to%20Congress.pdf>.

(CICA) summit in 2014, Xi explicitly called for Asian countries to “establish a new regional security cooperation architecture,” calling the existing U.S.-led alliance system the “outdated thinking from the age of Cold War and zero-sum game.”²²² This narrative quickly promulgated the narratives of high-ranking PRC diplomatic and military policymakers, who expressed with urgency the need to build a “new model of great power relations” [新型大国关系] with the United States while simultaneously accusing the United States of being a destabilizing regional force.²²³ The PRC began coordinating its foreign policy around undermining U.S. military ties in the region: for example, while negotiating a shared code of conduct in the South China Sea with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the CCP initially demanded that the code of conduct include a provision precluding any “foreign military power,” to include the United States, from having a military presence in the region.²²⁴ No longer was the CCP content with increasing its normative power in international affairs, as Hu Jintao’s “harmonious world” described. Under Xi Jinping, the CCP’s “striving to achieve” meant advancing a vision for international order which would displace the U.S. alliance network.²²⁵

²²² Xi Jinping, “New Asian Security Concept For New Progress in Security Cooperation,” (speech, Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, May 21, 2014), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1159951.shtml.

²²³ See, for example, then Lieutenant General Wang Guanzhong’s speech at the IISS-hosted Shangri-La Dialogue and then Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin’s article in the *People’s Daily*. Wang Guanzhong, “PLA LtGen Wang Guanzhong’s Remarks—Scripted & “Unscripted”—at Shangri-La Dialogue,” June 1, 2014, <https://www.andrewerickson.com/2014/06/pla-ltgen-wang-guanzhongs-remarks-scripted-unscripted-at-shangri-la-dialogue/>; Liu Zhenmin [刘振民], “Create a Peaceful and Stable Regional Environment by Building a Community with a Shared Future” [为构建命运共同体营造和平稳定的地区环境], *People’s Daily*, November 27, 2014, <http://world.people.com.cn/n/2014/1127/c1002-26101342.html>. Wang’s and Liu’s careers continued apace after these statements. Wang Guanzhong was promoted to general in 2015 and retired in 2017 as Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff Department, and in 2017 Liu was appointed UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. *Xinhua*, “China promotes 10 officers to general,” July 31, 2015, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-07/31/content_21468602.htm; Cheng Li, “Forecasting China’s Largest Ever Turnover of Military Elite at the 19th Party Congress,” *China-US Focus*, September 18, 2017, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/political-social-development/forecasting-chinas-largest-ever-turnover-of-military-elite-at-the-19th-party-congress>; United Nations, “Secretary-General Appoints Liu Zhenmin of China Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs,” June 8, 2017, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sga1736.doc.htm>.

²²⁴ *BenarNews*, “Philippine Official: China Sought to Block Foreign Powers in South China Sea,” September 11, 2019, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/philippines-southchinasea-09112019175312.html>.

²²⁵ Timothy R. Heath, “China and the U.S. Alliance System,” *The Diplomat*, June 11, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/china-and-the-u-s-alliance-system/>; Timothy Heath, “China Overhauls Diplomacy to Consolidate Regional Leadership, Outline Strategy for Superpower Ascent,” *China Brief*, December 19, 2014, <https://jamestown.org/program/china-overhauls-diplomacy-to-consolidate-regional-leadership-outline-strategy-for-superpower-ascent/>. For a thorough overview of CCP objection to and proposed alternatives for the U.S. alliance

The CCP's nationalist turn toward ambitions of international leadership in opposition to U.S. alliance networks was clarified and extended to include the security architecture beyond East Asia in Xi Jinping's 19th Party Congress Work Report. In his report, Xi unambiguously declared that the PRC will compete against the United States for global strategic influence and further claimed that CCP governance is entering a new era [新时代] in which the CCP would encourage the transformation of global governance to a multipolar system.²²⁶

The CCP adheres to a Marxist dialectical tradition that presupposes scientific natural laws [规律] by which the CCP can objectively understand and drive social progress.²²⁷ This progress is the resolution of contradictions [矛盾] which arise from misalignment of a society's economic base and its politico-social superstructure, or political order; as the former develops, the latter must also evolve pursuant to natural law. Contradictions constitute the CCP's theoretical conclusion that a political order is incompatible with emerging economic realities and must be rectified.²²⁸ Xi Jinping's 19th Party Congress Work Report asserts that the principal contradiction facing Chinese society is one of inadequate development despite the populace's growing needs.²²⁹ The CCP's ongoing resolution of this contradiction is also Xi's argument for global leadership: as the PRC develops in a way to successfully meet the needs of Chinese

structure in East Asia, see Adam P. Liff, "China and the US Alliance System," *The China Quarterly* 233, (2018), 136-165, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741017000601>.

²²⁶ Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era [习近平：决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告], (speech, Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017), http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm.

²²⁷ Xi Jinping, "Speech at the Ceremony Commemorating the Bicentenary of the Birth of Marx" *Qiushi* 10, no. 3, iss. 36, September 7, 2018, http://english.qstheory.cn/2018-09/07/c_1123371913.htm; Timothy R. Heath, *China's New Governing Party Paradigm: Political Renewal and the Pursuit of National Rejuvenation* (New York: Routledge 2014), 23.

²²⁸ Timothy R. Heath, *China's New Governing Party Paradigm: Political Renewal and the Pursuit of National Rejuvenation* (New York: Routledge 2014), 44 & 113.

²²⁹ "中国特色社会主义进入新时代，我国社会主要矛盾已经转化为人民日益增长的美好生活需要和不平衡不充分的发展之间的矛盾。" Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era [习近平：决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告], (speech, Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017), http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm.

society, other states should replicate this success by adopting the “Chinese plan of action” [中国方案] for economic development.²³⁰ In Marxist terms, the PRC will lead other states to reshape the global economic base, creating an emerging economic reality which necessitates change in the global political order.²³¹ In his 2017 Work Report, Xi called this a change one to a “new model of interstate relations” defined by a “community with shared future for mankind” [人类命运共同体].²³²

The CCP further clarified this political change in a 2019 white paper reaffirming its belief that the global “economic structure is undergoing a profound adjustment,” specifically that “the rise of China and other...developing countries is fundamentally altering the international structure of power” such that one country or a bloc can no longer “exercise dominance in world affairs.”²³³ Xi claimed that in the new era of transition toward the new model of interstate relations, the PRC is approaching center stage in world affairs, where the CCP will exert greater leadership than before; his assessment on the changing structure of international power all but called on the United States to make room.²³⁴ The change in PRC foreign policy under Xi Jinping

²³⁰ “中国特色社会主义道路、理论、制度、文化不断发展，拓展了发展中国家走向现代化的途径，给世界上那些既希望加快发展又希望保持自身独立性的国家和民族提供了全新选择，为解决人类问题贡献了中国智慧和中国方案。” Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era [习近平：决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告], (speech, Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017), http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm.

²³¹ The Central Party School makes this argument explicitly. See, for example, Yuan Sainan [袁赛男], “How China will profoundly influence the world in the New Era” [新时代中国如何更深刻影响世界], *Study Times* [学习时报], June 8, 2018, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0608/c40531-30044981.html>.

²³² The 人类命运共同体 or “community with shared future for mankind” is often translated as “community of common destiny.” This thesis uses the official translation provided by the PRC. “明确中国特色大国外交要推动构建新型国际关系，推动构建人类命运共同体” Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era [习近平：决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告], (speech, Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017), http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm.

²³³ PRC State Council Information Office, *China and the World in the New Era*, September 27, 2019, 17 & 29-30, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html.

²³⁴ “我国日益走近世界舞台中央、不断为人类作出更大贡献的时代。” Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era [习近平：决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告], (speech, Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China,

should not be understated: in a December 2017 speech to PRC diplomats stationed abroad, Xi introduced what quickly became a new *tifa* when he said the new era is characterized by “profound changes unseen in a century” [百年未有之大变局],²³⁵ including the “irreversible” global trend toward multipolarization.²³⁶

While Xi’s 2017 work report did not explicitly offer a revised security assessment, CCP foreign policy and military planning white papers issued in 2019 described the new era as one in which “the world is facing the danger of a relapse into fragmentation and even confrontation,” and the United States, by investing in its defense capabilities and strengthening its military alliances, is a significant driver of that danger.²³⁷ The CCP’s sense of increased danger because of the United States as portrayed in these white papers was not cheap talk; they appeared to reflect a growing debate beginning before Xi’s 19th Party Congress Work Report on whether tensions with the United States had effectively downgraded the PRC from a “period of strategic opportunity” to a “period of historic opportunity” [历史机遇期], with the salient change being

October 18, 2017), http://www.gov.cn/zhuanli/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm.

²³⁵ Qualifying as a new *tifa*, the rate at which 百年未有之大变局 appeared in major state media articles on international affairs increased significantly in the years after Xi first said it. See, for example, Li Yingqi [李应齐] et al., “The World Faces Profound Changes Unseen in a Century (Authoritative Forum)” [世界面临百年未有之大变局（权威论坛）], *People’s Daily*, December 24, 2018, <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2018/1224/c1002-30482989.html>; Chen Zhi [陈贽], Liu Lina [刘丽娜], and Qi Zijian [齐紫剑], “Special Feature: Go Boldly Through Profound Global Changes Into the New Era” [特稿：在世界大变局中奋进新时代], *Xinhua*, August 28, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2019-08/28/c_1124931634.htm; Wang Junsheng [王俊生] and Qin Sheng [秦升], “Grasping Opportunity in the ‘Profound Changes Unseen in a Century’” [从“百年未有之大变局”中把握机遇], *Red Flag Manuscript* [红旗文稿], April 10, 2019, <https://www.xuexi.cn/59fb372ff10fad37fbb4e95d1dd03d2b/e43e220633a65f9b6d8b53712cba9caa.html>; Ban Wei [班威], “Special Feature: Amid Centennial Changes, China’s Power Advances Peace and Development” [特稿：百年变局中推动和平与发展的中国力量], *Xinhua*, September 19, 2020, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-09/19/content_5544740.htm. For a compelling interpretation of the phrase’s role in CCP grand strategy, see Rush Doshi, “Beijing Believes Trump Is Accelerating American Decline,” *Foreign Policy*, October 12, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/10/12/china-trump-accelerating-american-decline/>.

²³⁶ “放眼世界，我们面对的是百年未有之大变局。新世纪以来一大批新兴市场国家和发展中国家快速发展，世界多极化加速发展，国际格局日趋均衡，国际潮流大势不可逆转。” Hou Lijun [侯丽军], “Xi Jinping Receives and Delivers an Important Speech To the 2017 Conference of Diplomats Stationed Abroad” [习近平接见 2017 年度驻外使节工作会议与会使节并发表重要讲话], *Xinhua*, December 28, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2017-12/28/c_1122181743.htm.

²³⁷ PRC State Council Information Office, *China and the World in the New Era*, September 27, 2019, 30, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html; PRC State Council Information Office, *China’s National Defense in the New Era*, July 24, 2019, 3-4, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm.

impressions among the CCP elite that they no longer enjoyed the permissive external environment Jiang Zemin highlighted in 2002.²³⁸ While Xi's Work Report did reaffirm that the PRC remained in a period of strategic opportunity and not a historic one, subsequent speeches and other articles from Xi and other Party leaders referenced the "period of historic opportunity," suggesting that the debate had not yet been resolved and that the voices calling for the end of the period of strategic opportunity may have grown louder since the 19th Party Congress.²³⁹

The CCP's communiqué following the 19th Party Congress's Fifth Plenum, in October 2020, appears to indicate that CCP leaders have maintained confidence that they remain in a period of strategic opportunity while accepting the costs of winning strategic competition against the United States. The communiqué specifically states that despite significant new challenges and opportunities, the PRC will remain in a period of strategic opportunity because of the "profound changes unseen in a century," including "profound adjustments to the international balance of power."²⁴⁰ Even so, the CCP leaders who believe they remain in a period of strategic opportunity appear to be giving ground. While the communiqué's description of adjustments to the international balance of power reaffirmed the CCP belief in multipolarization and U.S. decline, the 2020 document's characterization is less sanguine than Xi Jinping's speech at the 18th Party Congress Fifth Plenum in 2016, which described "unprecedented positive changes" in the international balance of power.²⁴¹ Moreover, the 2020 communiqué introduced, and Xi's

²³⁸ Evan S. Medeiros, "China Reacts: Assessing Beijing's Response to Trump's New China Strategy," *China Leadership Monitor*, March 1, 2019, <https://www.prcleader.org/medeiros>.

²³⁹ Evan S. Medeiros, "China Reacts: Assessing Beijing's Response to Trump's New China Strategy," *China Leadership Monitor*, March 1, 2019, <https://www.prcleader.org/medeiros>.

²⁴⁰ "全会深入分析了我国发展环境面临的深刻复杂变化，认为当前和今后一个时期，我国发展仍然处于重要战略机遇期，但机遇和挑战都有新的发展变化。当今世界正经历百年未有之大变局，新一轮科技革命和产业变革深入发展，国际力量对比深刻调整，和平与发展仍然是时代主题" *Xinhua*, "(Authorized Release) Communiqué of the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China" [（受权发布）中国共产党第十九届中央委员会第五次全体会议公报], October 29, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-10/29/c_1126674147.htm.

²⁴¹ "国际力量对比正在发生前所未有的积极变化" Xi Jinping, (speech, seminar on the study and implementation of the spirit of the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China [省部级主要领导干部学习贯彻党的十八届五中全会精神专题研讨班上], January 18, 2016), <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0510/c64094-28337020.html>.

remarks at a subsequent Politburo group study session reaffirmed, a new emphasis on coordinating development with security [统筹发展和安全], apparently in recognition of the increased risks to development under a period of strategic opportunity that the CCP accrues as it continues to advocate a foreign policy at odds with the United States.²⁴² This elevation of security interests alongside economic interests was reaffirmed in the 2020 revisions to the PRC National Defense Law; article 6 of the law was revised to describe “coordinated, balanced, and compatible development” between economic and national defense efforts, while the prior version²⁴³ stated that the PRC will “strengthen national defense while focusing on economic development,” clearly prioritizing economic development over security interests.²⁴⁴

CCP Maritime Strategy: Becoming a Maritime Great Power

CCP leaders have over the past decade described their pursuit of national rejuvenation as dependent on achieving a prerequisite goal of transforming the PRC into a “maritime great power,” [海洋强国]. When then-CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao first used the term in the 18th Party Congress Work Report in 2012, the phrase had, as Liza Tobin lays out, four

²⁴² *Xinhua*, “(Authorized Release) Communiqué of the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China” [（授权发布）中国共产党第十九届中央委员会第五次全体会议公报], October 29, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-10/29/c_1126674147.htm; CCTV, “(Video) At the 26th Group Study Session of the CCP Central Committee Politburo, Xi Jinping Stressed the Need to Adhere to Systematic Thinking and Build a Grand Security Structure to Provide a Strong Guarantee for Building a Modern Socialist Country” [[视频]习近平在中央政治局第二十六次集体学习时强调 坚持系统思维构建大安全格局 为建设社会主义现代化国家提供坚强保障], December 12, 2020, <https://tv.cctv.com/2020/12/12/VIDESfzRHZ8Kluo3GxMPnMzp201212.shtml?spm=C31267.PFsKSaKh6QQC.S71105.3>.

²⁴³ The text of the PRC National Defense Law promulgated in 1997 remained largely in force until the 2020 revision came into effect on January 1, 2021. A 2009 revision to the law constituted a one-phrase change amending the state’s authority to “commandeer” [征用] civilian assets for national defense purposes into the authority to “levy and commandeer” [征收、征用] these assets. PRC National People’s Congress, “National People’s Congress Standing Committee Decision Regarding Partially Amending Laws” [全国人民代表大会常务委员会关于修改部分法律的决定], August 27, 2009, http://www.gov.cn/jflfg/2009-08/27/content_1403326.htm.

²⁴⁴ The 2020 revision reads “国家坚持经济建设和国防建设协调、平衡、兼容发展,” while the prior version read, “国家在集中力量进行经济建设的同时, 加强国防建设, 促进国防建设与经济建设协调发展。” *Xinhua*, “Authorized Release: PRC National Defense Law” [（授权发布）中华人民共和国国防法], December 26, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-12/27/c_1126911647.htm; PRC National People’s Congress, “PRC National Defense Law” [中华人民共和国国防法], March 14, 1997, http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/wxzl/2000-12/05/content_4681.htm.

characteristics: 1) the ability to exploit ocean resources, 2) a developed maritime economy, 3) preservation of the marine environment and 4) resolute protection of “maritime rights and interests” [海洋权益].²⁴⁵ A few years afterward, General Secretary Xi Jinping described a broader concept involving economic development, international trade, ecological protection, and a modern navy as key constituents of the PRC becoming a maritime great power.²⁴⁶ Xi’s own policy pronouncements couch this pursuit in terms of “land-sea integrated planning” [陆海统筹] and further describes becoming a maritime great power as a critical step in realizing the CCP’s paramount objective of national rejuvenation.²⁴⁷

This section will argue that Hu’s 2012 definition was a compromise which injected a new emphasis on sea power into elite CCP discourse at the highest levels despite having a definition drawing largely on Jiang Zemin-era terminology for maritime policy. Moreover, this compromise was a critical step for the CCP under Hu to begin envisioning its grand strategy in maritime terms rather than continental terms—in other words, to begin a maritime transformation.

Jiang Zemin’s Maritime Terminology

Jiang Zemin introduced into the PRC’s political discourse many of the foundational concepts of modern Chinese maritime policy and was the first CCP leader to establish “building

²⁴⁵ Hu Jintao, “Firmly March on the Path of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive to Complete the Building of a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects [坚定不移沿着中国特色社会主义道路前进 为全面建成小康社会而奋斗],” (speech, 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, November 8, 2012), <http://www.71.cn/2013/0131/695078.shtml>; Liza Tobin, “Underway—Beijing’s Strategy to Build China into a Maritime Great Power,” *Naval War College Review* 71, no. 2 (Spring), 17-49, 2, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1734&context=nwc-review>.

²⁴⁶ *People’s Daily*, “To Become a Maritime Great Power, Xi Jinping Raises Requirements from These Aspects” [建设海洋强国, 习近平从这些方面提出要求], June 11, 2019, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0711/c164113-31226894.html>.

²⁴⁷ Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era [习近平: 决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告],” (speech, Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017), http://www.gov.cn/zhuanti/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm; *Xinhua*, “Xi Jinping: Improve Concern For the Ocean, Recognize Oceanic Economics and Strategy, Stimulate Construction of Maritime Power, and Unceasingly Secure New Accomplishments” [习近平: 进一步关心海洋认识海洋经略海洋 推动海洋强国建设不断取得新成就], July 31, 2013, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-07/31/c_116762285.htm.

China into a maritime great power,” which he called an “important historical task” to be studied, as a national objective.²⁴⁸ This 2000 declaration sparked a surge of academic and policy articles in China attempting to define sea power and its application to the PRC.²⁴⁹ While the question of Chinese sea power was not settled during Jiang’s time as General Secretary, his leadership did anchor the debate in three interlinked phrases which persist in modern discourse on PRC maritime strategy: 1) the PRC’s “maritime rights and interests,” 2) Chinese “sea consciousness,” [海洋意识] and 3) the “blue Chinese soil” [蓝色国土] that is the sea. Consistent with CCP grand strategic perspectives leading up to 1999, these terms referred largely to economic development without concerted efforts at international strategic competition.

Each of Jiang’s maritime terms is a flexible assertion of Chinese maritime sovereignty and right to exploit ocean resources for economic development. The PRC’s “maritime rights and interests” first entered Chinese legal parlance with passage of the 1992 PRC Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone Law [中华人民共和国领海及毗连区法] as the plenary power to control foreign and domestic activity in China’s territorial seas²⁵⁰ and contiguous zone.²⁵¹ The “rights” generally refer to exclusive rights to exploit maritime resources in waters over which the PRC lays claim, and the “interests” appear to secure SLOCs in China’s maritime periphery.²⁵² Maritime rights

²⁴⁸ “江泽民同志明确提出“建设海洋强国是一项重要的历史任务，要认真进行研究。” Chinese Society for Oceanography [中国海洋学会], “Symposium commemorating the 10th anniversary of China’s ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea held in Beijing [纪念我国批准《联合国海洋法公约》十周年座谈会在京召开],” May 17, 2006, <http://www.cso.org.cn/Xhdt/xuehuitongzhi/2013/0507/969.html>; Andrew Chubb, “Xi Jinping and China’s maritime policy,” *Brookings*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/xi-jinping-and-chinas-maritime-policy/>.

²⁴⁹ Daniel M. Hartnett and Frederic Vellucci, “Toward a Maritime Security Strategy: An Analysis of Chinese Views Since the Early 1990s” in *The Chinese Navy: Expanding Capabilities, Evolving Roles*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders, Christopher Yung, Michael Swaine, and Andrew Nien-Dzu Yang, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2011), 83.

²⁵⁰ These definitions align with those laid forth in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). See United Nations, “United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea,” December 10, 1982, 1833 U.N.T.S. art. 2 & art. 33, https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part2.htm.

²⁵¹ PRC National People’s Congress, “Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone” [中华人民共和国领海及毗连区法], February 25, 1992, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/diaoyudao/chn/flfg/zcfg/t1304544.htm>.

²⁵² Isaac B. Kardon, “Maritime Rights and Interests,” *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, July 16, 2015, <https://amti.csis.org/maritime-rights-and-interests/>.

and interests remain a staple of PRC policy, regularly appearing in official PRC five-year plans and responses to foreign governments over maritime disputes.²⁵³ Notably, these rights and interests are not rigorously bounded to PRC territorial waters, contiguous zone, or even China's maritime periphery. As of 2010, the Director of the PRC State Ocean Administration referred to the PRC's rights and interests in the polar regions, several thousand miles from China's northernmost point, and by 2012 the SOA director insisted that it was necessary for the PRC to defend its maritime rights and interests beyond its territorial seas.²⁵⁴

Chinese "sea consciousness" is less well-defined, seemingly referring to Chinese popular interest in and support for policies regarding these maritime rights and interests as well as other political, economic, and military applications of the sea.²⁵⁵ As early as 1995, Jiang Zemin had personally urged greater understanding of the ocean's strategic value for the PRC's long-term economic development and called for "enhancing the Chinese people's sea consciousness."²⁵⁶ A 1998 white paper on PRC maritime industry similarly described sea consciousness as necessary for advancing the PRC's maritime economic development.²⁵⁷ Interest in building sea consciousness appears to be an enduring policy priority for the PRC, as

²⁵³ PRC National People's Congress, *Outline of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan for Social Development* [社会发展第十一个五年规划纲要], March 14, 2006, http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2006/content_268766.htm.

²⁵⁴ "极地领域的正当权益" *Xinhua*, "Authoritative Interview: State Oceanic Administration Director Sun Zhihui Discusses China's Maritime Development Strategy [权威访谈: 海洋局局长孙志辉谈中国海洋发展战略]," September 5, 2010, http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2010-09/05/content_1696025.htm; "在管辖海域外的海洋权益也需要不断加以维护和拓展。这些都需要通过建设海洋强国加以保障" *Xinhua*, "Liu Cigui: The First Mention of 'Maritime Great Power' in the 18th CCP Party Congress Work Report is of Great Practical and Strategic Significance [刘赐贵: 十八大报告首提'海洋强国'具有重要现实和战略意义], November 10, 2012, http://www.xinhuanet.com/18cpcnc/2012-11/10/c_113656862.htm.

²⁵⁵ Daniel M. Hartnett and Frederic Vellucci, "Toward a Maritime Security Strategy: An Analysis of Chinese Views Since the Early 1990s" in *The Chinese Navy: Expanding Capabilities, Evolving Roles*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders, Christopher Yung, Michael Swaine, and Andrew Nien-Dzu Yang, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2011), 90.

²⁵⁶ "开发和利用海洋, 对于我国的长远发展将具有越来越重要的意义。我们一定要从战略的高度认识海洋, 增强全民族的海洋意识。" Jiao Yongke [焦永科], "Enrich Maritime Culture, Develop the Maritime Economy [弘扬海洋文化 发展海洋经济], *China Ocean News* [中国海洋报] no. 147, date unknown, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070102122538/http://soa.gov.cn/zhanlue/14073a.htm>; Daniel M. Hartnett and Frederic Vellucci, "Toward a Maritime Security Strategy: An Analysis of Chinese Views Since the Early 1990s" in *The Chinese Navy: Expanding Capabilities, Evolving Roles*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders, Christopher Yung, Michael Swaine, and Andrew Nien-Dzu Yang, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2011), 91.

²⁵⁷ PRC State Council Information Office, *The Development of China's Marine Industries* [中国海洋事业的发展], May 1998, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/ndhf/1998/Document/307963/307963.htm>.

five year plans in 2006 and 2016 include specific campaigns to build national sea consciousness, with the latter plan setting an objective of building a national sea consciousness propaganda-education-cultural system by 2020.²⁵⁸

Jiang and other top CCP officials under Jiang's leadership made repeated reference to China's maritime periphery as "blue Chinese soil," with U.S. and PRC experts alike assessing that the CCP's use of this phrase deliberately connotes an equivalence between territorial claims and maritime claims in the way typical of a continental power.²⁵⁹ As early as 1991, Jiang discussed as maritime strategic objectives protecting the "blue Chinese soil" and "blue treasure house" [蓝色国土和蓝色宝库] of the ocean, conferring the PRC's sovereignty and economic maritime interests.²⁶⁰ In 1996, then CMC Vice Chairman and Politburo Standing Committee member Liu Huaqing [刘华清] similarly called on the PLAN to develop its combat capabilities to become "strong defenders of blue Chinese soil."²⁶¹ Like "maritime rights and interests" and "sea consciousness," "blue Chinese soil" has remained an enduring part of CCP discourse on maritime policy, with *PRC Ocean Development Reports* [《中国海洋经济发展报告》] in 2010 and 2016 both using the phrase.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ PRC National People's Congress, *Outline of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan for Social Development* [社会发展第十一个五年规划纲要], March 14, 2006, http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2006/content_268766.htm; *China News Service* [中国新闻网], "Thirteenth Five Year Plan for Publicity, Education, and Cultural Construction of National Sea Consciousness' Published" [《全民海洋意识宣传教育和文化建设“十三五”规划》出台], March 8, 2016, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2016/03-08/7789246.shtml>; "总体目标：到2020年初步建成全方位、多层次、宽领域的全民海洋意识宣传教育和文化建设体系" China Internet Information Center [中国网国情中心], "What is the Thirteenth Five Year Plan for Publicity, Education, and Cultural Construction of National Sea Consciousness? [什么是全民海洋意识宣传教育和文化建设“十三五”规划?]," February 27, 2018, http://guoqing.china.com.cn/zhuant/2018-02/27/content_50614070.htm.

²⁵⁹ Dean Cheng, "China's 'Blue Soil,'" *War on the Rocks*, August 2, 2013, <https://warontherocks.com/2013/08/chinas-blue-soil/>; Willy Wo-Lap Lam, *The Era of Jiang Zemin*, (New York: Prentice Hall, 1999), 163.

²⁶⁰ Quoted in Shi Hongyuan [时宏远], "Jiang Zemin's Thought and Practice on Sea Power: A Constructivist Analysis" [江泽民的海权思想与实践——基于建构主义的分析], *Journal of Xuzhou Institute of Technology (Social Sciences Edition)* [徐州工程学院学报(社会科学版)] 27, no. 1 (January 2012), 24-26.

²⁶¹ "只有领导和机关自身要求严，做得好，才能抓好部队的战斗力建设，才能带领广大指战员做蓝色国土的坚强守卫者。" Zhu Xuewen [朱学文], "Inspecting the East China Sea Fleet, Liu Huaqing Encourages the Navy to be Strong Guards of China's Blue Territory" [刘华清考察东海舰队时勉励官兵做蓝色国土的坚强卫士], *Xinhua*, May 20, 1996, <https://cn.govopendata.com/renminribao/1996/5/21/1/#1047996>.

²⁶² Dean Cheng, "China's 'Blue Soil,'" *War on the Rocks*, August 2, 2013, <https://warontherocks.com/2013/08/chinas-blue-soil/>; Qiu Lihua [裘立华], "Plan and Control the Oceans, Deeply Plow the Blue Chinese Soil" [经略海洋 深耕蓝色

Hu Jintao's Great Power Ambitions and Maritime Transformation

In the course of shaping greater international ambitions for the CCP, Hu Jintao began but could not complete within his tenure a PRC maritime transformation to realize those ambitions. Hu's ambitions for the CCP to "actively make a difference" in shaping a "harmonious world" and his inability to set aside the Deng-era political restraints on CCP foreign policy paralleled his partial success in enlisting sea power as handmaid of the PRC's rise in global power and influence.

Hu began clarifying a position that the CCP should openly seek great power status and that building sea power was the means to do so quickly after he took office in 2002. Having weak military credentials and ultimately spending much of his tenure attempting to earn the PLA's goodwill rather than firmly directing their activities, Hu made outreach to the PLAN a key pillar of his sea power effort.²⁶³ After Jiang Zemin delivered his final Party Congress Work Report, which announced the period of strategic opportunity and spoke of maritime policy only with regard to economic development, Hu struck a more assertive tone, calling on the PLAN to expand its mission and capability set by making a "gradual transition to far-seas defense, enhancing the far-seas maneuvering operations capabilities."²⁶⁴ He strengthened this call in 2004 when he announced the PLA's "new historic missions," which expand the PLA's mission set to safeguard national interests in, among others, the far reaches of the maritime domain.²⁶⁵

国土], *Xinhua*, September 28, 2016, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-09/28/content_5113074.htm.

²⁶³ On Hu Jintao's relationship with the PLA, see Nan Li, "Top Leaders and the PLA: The Different Styles of Jiang, Hu, and Xi," in *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 126-128.

²⁶⁴ Hu's call for additional PLA capabilities quoted in Nan Li, "The Evolution of China's Naval Strategy and Capabilities: From "Near Coast" and "Near Seas" to "Far Seas"," *Asian Security* 5, no. 2 (May 28, 2009), 160. For Jiang's work report, see Jiang Zemin, "Build a Well-off Society in an All-Round Way and Create a New Situation in Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics [全面建设小康社会, 开创中国特色社会主义事业新局面], (speech, Sixteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, November 8, 2002), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/zyjh_674906/t10855.shtml.

²⁶⁵ Hu Jintao, "Clearly See our Military's Historic Missions in the New Century of the New Period [认清新世纪新阶段我军历史使命], (speech, December 24, 2004).; Daniel M. Hartnett, "The 'New Historic Missions': Reflections on Hu Jintao's Military Legacy," in *Assessing the People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era*, eds. Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Travis Tanner, (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2014), 31-80.

The defense white paper released that year similarly introduced an imperative for the PLAN to be able to seize “command of the sea,” [夺取制海] a defining component of Mahanian sea power.²⁶⁶

Hu’s overtures to the PLAN ran parallel to a campaign he waged within the CCP to make becoming a maritime great power a defining objective. This effort began in 2003 with two steps: first, the PRC releases a long-term maritime development plan which describes the “overall goal of developing the maritime economy” as, among other things, “gradually building the PRC into a maritime great power.”²⁶⁷ While this specification, the last in a lengthy list of maritime economic development objectives, was released with little fanfare, it was an early articulation in a high-level planning document that becoming a maritime great power was now a PRC objective and no longer only a matter to be studied, as Jiang had directed three years prior. Second, Hu’s speech at the final Politburo group study session in 2003 regarded the history of the rise of great powers, and the study session concluded by commissioning a study into the factors giving rise to countries becoming great powers.²⁶⁸ While presently available open source documents do not offer any certainty that Hu intended to or did successfully shape the findings of this study, the results were congruous and fortuitously timed with other steps Hu took to urge the CCP to prioritize making the PRC a maritime great power.

Also in 2003, CCP propaganda outlets began previewing the 600th anniversary of Zheng He’s 1405 voyage, scheduled to fall in 2005; this propaganda campaign stressed an invented

²⁶⁶ PRC State Council Information Office, *China’s National Defense in 2004*, December 2004, <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20041227/index.htm>; Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, (1890; reprint, New York: Dover, 1987), 138.

²⁶⁷ “海洋经济发展的总体目标...逐步把我国建设成为海洋强国。” PRC State Council Information Office, *Outline of the National Plan for Marine Economic Development* [全国海洋经济发展规划纲要], May 9, 2003, http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2003/content_62156.htm.

²⁶⁸ Hu Jintao, “Further Understand and Grasp the Law of Social and Historical Development [胡锦涛：进一步认识把握社会历史发展规律],” (speech, Ninth Group Study of the 16th Communist Party of China Central Committee Political Bureau, November 24, 2003), <http://www.12371.cn/2012/10/26/ARTI1351230423409364.shtml>; “16th Communist Party of China Central Committee Political Bureau Group Studies [第十六届中央政治局集体学习],” *Communist Party Network* [共产党员网], accessed August 22, 2020, <http://www.12371.cn/special/lnzzjtxx/shouye/index.shtml>.

narrative of China's proud maritime tradition and associated it with "the greatness of Chinese Civilization."²⁶⁹ The propaganda campaign included establishing July 11, 2005 as the first annual "Navigation Day," during which state media outlets celebrate PRC themes such as PRC maritime greatness and the peaceful nature of Chinese civilization.²⁷⁰ In 2013, retired PLAN Admiral Zheng Ming [郑明] stated openly that promulgating the Zheng He narrative was instrumental in increasing Chinese sea consciousness and building the PRC into a maritime great power.²⁷¹

After laying the foundations in 2003 and campaigning for greater sea consciousness in the years following, official documents and one of Hu's own speeches published in 2006 appeared to reveal Hu's bid to build a maritime vision into how the CCP pursues great power. First, the 11th Five Year Plans published in March offered new imperatives and challenges in PRC maritime development. The *Five Year Plan for Social Development* included a section acknowledging Jiang's maritime terms of sea consciousness and maritime rights and interests before emphasizing in comparatively stronger terms the need to exploit marine resources in the PRC's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and seabed resources along China's continental shelf and in international waters.²⁷² The 11th Five Year Plan for the Development of Marine Science

²⁶⁹ *Xinhua*, "600th Anniversary of Zheng He's Voyages to Asia, Africa to Be Marked," December 5, 2003, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/international/81659.htm>; John Dotson, "The Confucian Revival in the Propaganda Narratives of the Chinese Government," *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, July 20, 2011, 19, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Confucian_Revival_Paper.pdf.

²⁷⁰ *People's Daily*, "People's Daily calls for peaceful development in spirit of ancient navigator," July 12, 2005, http://en.people.cn/200507/12/eng20050712_195546.html.

²⁷¹ Zheng Ming [郑明], "Zheng Ming: To Build China into a Maritime Great Power, Researching Zheng He has Great Practical Significance [郑明: 建海洋强国 研究郑和对现实有重要意义]," *Global Times*, March 27, 2013, <https://mil.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJzPyq>. On Zheng Ming's background, see Yue Huairang [岳怀让], "Zheng Ming, former head of the Navy's equipment and technology department, has died. He and Liu Huaqing advocated for Chinese aircraft carriers [海军原装备技术部部长郑明逝世, 曾与刘华清一同论证中国航母]," *The Paper* [澎湃新闻], March 15, 2018, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2030414.

²⁷² "有重点地勘探开发专属经济区、大陆架和国际海底资源" PRC National People's Congress, *Outline of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan for Social Development* [社会发展第十一个五年规划纲要], March 14, 2006, http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2006/content_268766.htm.

and Technology specified that the PRC is a “maritime large power but not a maritime great power” [我国是一个海洋大国，但不是海洋强国].²⁷³

As if to answer the new interests and challenges raised in the 11th Five Year Plans, the study on factors contributing to great power status commissioned in 2003, called *Rise of the Great Powers* [大国崛起] was completed and published in November 2006. As Andrew Erickson and Lyle Goldstein explain, the study “suggests that national power stems from economic development fueled by foreign trade, which can in turn be furthered by a strong navy... *The Rise of Great Powers* suggests that developing maritime power is necessary but not sufficient to support the rise of a great power.”²⁷⁴ Ensuring the findings are publicized, the study was published as an eight-volume book set and a twelve-part documentary on the state television network, where it received significant popular and expert attention.²⁷⁵

In December 2006, Hu Jintao again spoke to the PLAN at the 10th PLAN Party Congress, where he explicitly called the PRC a “maritime large power” in need of a more powerful navy to ensure PRC security and sovereignty.²⁷⁶ The several threads of Hu’s messaging through CCP and PRC organs between 2003 and 2006 coalesce into three key points: 1) the PRC is a maritime large power but not a maritime great power, 2) the PRC should

²⁷³ PRC Ministry of Natural Resources, *Outline of the National Eleventh Five-Year Plan for The Development of Marine Science and Technology* [国家“十一五”海洋科学和技术发展规划纲要], September 17, 2009, http://gc.mnr.gov.cn/201806/t20180614_1796431.html.

²⁷⁴ Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle J. Goldstein, “China Studies the Rise of Great Powers,” in *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 402 & 419.

²⁷⁵ *People’s Daily*, “The Rise of Great Powers [《大国崛起》],” December 25, 2006, <http://book.people.com.cn/GB/69399/75501/index.html>; CCTV, “China Central Television’s Grand Launch of its 12-Episode Documentary ‘The Rise of Great Powers’ [中央电视台 12 集大型电视纪录片《大国崛起》隆重推出], November 14, 2006, <http://finance.cctv.com/special/C16860/20061114/103406.shtml>; *Sina Finance*, “Wang Jisi and Zhou Yan Discuss *The Rise of Great Powers*” [王缉思和周艳聊大国崛起实录], November 22, 2006, <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/12911.html>.

²⁷⁶ *PLA Daily*, “Hu Jintao Emphasizes that China is a Maritime Great Power and Should Build a Large and Powerful Navy (pictures) [胡锦涛强调中国是海洋大国应建设强大海军(图)],” December 28, 2006, <http://jczs.news.sina.com.cn/2006-12-28/0551422818.html>; *China News Service* [中国新闻社], “Hu Jintao Emphasizes Forging a Great and Powerful Navy Befitting the Requirements of its Historic Missions” [胡锦涛强调锻造适应历史使命要求的强大人民海军], December 27, 2006, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/news/2006/12-27/845038.shtml>.

dedicate resources to and pursue in earnest a goal of making the PRC a maritime great power, and 3) the components of sea power, including foreign trade safeguarded by a powerful navy, are also components of great power status.

Although state media articles surrounding the release of *The Rise of Great Powers* made reference to national rejuvenation, Hu's campaign for the CCP to undertake a concerted effort toward maritime great power status faced opposition from adherents to a continental grand strategic vision and as such did not include a public, explicit statement that making the PRC a maritime great power is necessary for national rejuvenation.²⁷⁷ When delivering his Work Report at the 17th Party Congress in 2007, Hu was only able to offer that the marine industry is among those which ought to be transformed from "large" to "strong" [促进工业由大变强].²⁷⁸ Despite Hu's apparent preference for a maritime transformation in the CCP's grand strategy, his efforts between 2004 and 2006 did not accrue enough political support to pass the consensus-building process in advance of the 17th Party Congress.

Chinese academic and bureaucratic publications at this time generally agreed that sea power was important, but whether it was so important as to displace a primarily continentalist view of threat perception, economic and military investment, and diplomatic strategy remained hotly disputed.²⁷⁹ In 2003, a recognizable "sea power school" among Chinese academics asserting that command of the seas is a teleological evolution from command of land in the course of human development began taking shape, drawing criticism from prominent

²⁷⁷ CCTV, "China Central Television's Grand Launch of its 12-Episode Documentary 'The Rise of Great Powers' [中央电视台 12 集大型电视纪录片《大国崛起》隆重推出], November 14, 2006, <http://finance.cctv.com/special/C16860/20061114/103406.shtml>.

²⁷⁸ Hu Jintao, "Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive for New Victories in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in all Respects" [高举中国特色社会主义伟大旗帜为夺取全面建设小康社会新胜利而奋斗], (speech, Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 15, 2007), http://www.gov.cn/lidhd/2007-10/24/content_785431.htm.

²⁷⁹ Daniel M. Hartnett and Frederic Vellucci, "Toward a Maritime Security Strategy: An Analysis of Chinese Views Since the Early 1990s" in *The Chinese Navy: Expanding Capabilities, Evolving Roles*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders, Christopher Yung, Michael Swaine, and Andrew Nien-Dzu Yang, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2011), 102.

academics such as Ye Zicheng [叶自成] at Peking University and Xu Qiyu [徐弃郁] at the PRC National Defense University, who considered the informal group's emphasis on sea power and deviation from a land power focus dangerously fallacious.²⁸⁰ The PLAGF, which as the largest PLA service dominated the military's structure and readily used its bureaucratic heft to defend its mission sets and resource allocation, likely lodged similar protests in private, given the likely tradeoffs the PLAGF would endure if the PRC resourced the PLAN to pursue rejuvenation through sea power.²⁸¹

Hu Persists with Land-Sea Integration

Writing in 2007, Peking University professor Li Yihu [李义虎] distilled the land power vs. sea power debate as one which required “establishing a holistic concept integrating land and sea priorities to replace the traditional mentality that the land outweighs the sea.”²⁸² While Li did not originate this concept or phrase, his proposed solution touched on a recurring theme in Hu's second and final term as CCP General Secretary. Perhaps suggesting the influence of Li's holistic concept, he was appointed to the Foreign Affairs Committee at the 11th National People's Congress [全国人民代表大会外事委员会] the following year.²⁸³ In Hu's second term, this holistic land-sea approach became a prominent message which defanged continentalist opposition to a greater maritime emphasis in PRC foreign policy planning and ultimately

²⁸⁰ Zhang Wei [张炜], “A General Review of the History of China's Sea-Power Theory Development,” trans. Shazeda Ahmed, *Naval War College Review* 68, no. 4 (2015), 80-93, 85-86, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol68/iss4/8/>.

²⁸¹ *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 40, 113, 130. For the PLA's culture of ground force domination, see Michael S. Chase et al., *China's Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)*, (Washington, D.C.: RAND Corporation, 2015), 51, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/China's%20Incomplete%20Military%20Transformation_2.11.15.pdf.

²⁸² “确立海陆统筹的全方位观念，改变重陆轻海的传统思维” Li Yihu [李义虎], “From Discrete Sea and Land to a Sea-Land Comprehensive Concept—Re-examining China's Sea and Land Power [从海陆二分到海陆统筹——对中国海陆关系的再审视], *Contemporary International Relations* [《现代国际关系》] 8, (2007), 1-7, <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/97720.html>.

²⁸³ *Xinhua*, “Standing Committee of the Eleventh National People's Congress” [第十一届全国人民代表大会常务委员会], March 15, 2008, http://www.gov.cn/test/2008-03/15/content_920964_3.htm.

empowered Hu to include making the PRC a “maritime great power” a national objective in his 18th Party Congress Work Report.

Hu continued pressing forward with ambitions of beginning a maritime transformation, notably attending the 60th anniversary of the PLAN, which state media and foreign analysts described as the PLAN’s “coming out” as a modern navy.²⁸⁴ In the years following, several PRC state organs released high-level policy and strategic documents emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to the PRC’s continental and maritime priorities. In 2010, the National People’s Congress Vice Chair Chen Changzhi [陈昌智] described the primary task of PRC maritime economic policy as taking a holistic approach to continental and maritime development [首先要统筹海陆发展].²⁸⁵ At the same time, State Oceanic Administration head Sun Zhihui [孙志辉] described the PRC maritime development strategy as one which adheres to a holistic land-sea approach [坚持海陆统筹].²⁸⁶ These themes return in 2011 as part of the PRC’s 12th Five Year Plan, which includes a chapter promoting development of the marine economy which, for the first time, describes greater PRC engagement in international maritime affairs.²⁸⁷ The 12th Five Year Plan also calls for formulating a maritime development strategy which implements a holistic approach to land and sea.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ *Xinhua*, “China Concludes Celebration of Navy Anniversary With Grand Fleet Review,” April 24, 2009, http://www.bjreview.com.cn/quotes/txt/2009-04/24/content_192515.htm; Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China’s Navy in the Twenty-First Century 2nd Edition*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010), xiii.

²⁸⁵ *Xinhua*, “Blue Economy Forum in Beijing: Chen Changzhi Attends the Opening Ceremony and Gives a Speech [蓝色经济论坛在京举行 陈昌智出席开幕式并致辞],” September 5, 2010, http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2010-09/05/content_1696191.htm.

²⁸⁶ *Xinhua*, “Authoritative Interview: State Oceanic Administration Director Sun Zhihui Discusses China’s Maritime Development Strategy [权威访谈：海洋局局长孙志辉谈中国海洋发展战略],” September 5, 2010, http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2010-09/05/content_1696025.htm.

²⁸⁷ “加强双边多边海洋事务磋商，积极参与国际海洋事务，保障海上运输通道安全，维护我国海洋权益” PRC National People’s Congress, *Outline of the Twelfth Five-Year Plan for Social Development* [社会发展第十二个五年规划纲要], March 16, 2011, http://www.gov.cn/2011lh/content_1825838.htm.

²⁸⁸ “坚持陆海统筹，制定和实施海洋发展战略，提高海洋开发、控制、综合管理能力” PRC National People’s Congress, *Outline of the Twelfth Five-Year Plan for Social Development* [社会发展第十二个五年规划纲要], March 16, 2011, http://www.gov.cn/2011lh/content_1825838.htm.

These efforts to defang continentalist objections partially paid off in 2012, when several elite CCP developments and statements, including the 18th Party Congress Work Report, appeared to reinforce parts of Hu's interests in applying a concerted effort, including increased naval investment, toward transforming the PRC from a maritime large power into a maritime great power in pursuit of national rejuvenation. Although Hu-era messaging did not emphasize or develop Jiang-era terminology, Hu's partial success came from framing the objective of becoming a maritime great power in those terms. Hu renewed Jiang's focus on maritime rights and interests for the purpose of increasing CCP hard power at sea. In 2012, the CCP saw renewed interest in preserving these maritime rights and interests in the form of a newly-established Central Maritime Rights Protection Leading Small Group [中央海洋权益工作领导小组] as well as a newly-emboldened paranaul interest in securing those rights: in July 2012, PRC Maritime Surveillance [中国海监总队] Party Secretary Sun Shuxian [孙书贤] introduced a newly belligerent line in the PRC's regard for its rights and interests by calling for use of military force, up to and including waging a war, to defend disputed maritime claims.²⁸⁹ When Hu announced in the 18th Party Congress Work Report that one of the CCP's objectives was now to make the PRC a maritime great power, he characterized that objective as largely Jiang-era goals of maritime development, adding only a hard military edge to resolutely protect maritime rights and interests [坚决维护国家海洋权益，建设海洋强国].²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ China Internet Information Center [中国网海洋频道], "China establishes the central office of maritime rights as a high-level maritime coordination body" [中国已成立中央海权办 系涉海高层次协调机构], March 2, 2013, http://ocean.china.com.cn/2013-03/02/content_28105606.htm; *Phoenix TV*, "Sun Shuxian: If Japan dares to cross the red line, China will not hesitate to fight a war [孙书贤：日本若敢越红线 中方不惜一战]," July 13, 2012, https://web.archive.org/web/20120713113918/http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/special/diaoyudaozhengduan/content-3/detail_2012_07/13/16008749_0.shtml.

²⁹⁰ Hu Jintao, "Firmly March on the Path of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive to Complete the Building of a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects [坚定不移沿着中国特色社会主义道路前进 为全面建成小康社会而奋斗]," (speech, 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. November 8, 2012), <http://www.71.cn/2013/0131/695078.shtml>.

As delivered, Hu's 18th Party Congress Work report tied the "maritime great power" objective back to Jiang-era sovereignty and economic development concerns rather than forward-looking ambitions of national rejuvenation and global leadership he exhibited when emphasizing the CCP should "actively make a difference" in global affairs.²⁹¹ Hu was unable to overcome objections in the consensus-building process ahead of the 18th Party Congress and could not tie Chinese sea power to national rejuvenation. Some indicators that year following the Party Congress hint that these aspects of the Work Report represented a compromise position, and some bureaucratic elements expressed positions more in line with Hu's vision for great power status rather than Jiang's narrower focus on maritime rights and interest. State Oceanic Administration head Liu Cigui [刘赐贵] offered an authoritative interview in which he described becoming a maritime great power as the only way for the PRC to become a global great power and additionally offered that becoming a maritime great power is necessary for the PRC to defend its maritime rights and interests beyond its territorial seas.²⁹² Similarly, the Chinese Academy of Sciences began publishing articles assessing the PRC as a maritime large power and discussing ways it could become a maritime great power.²⁹³

Xi Jinping Continues PRC Maritime Transformation

Not unlike their respective efforts to turn the CCP toward a more activist foreign policy, Xi benefitted from and continued Hu's work in driving PRC maritime transformation. Shortly after

²⁹¹ Hu Jintao, "Coordinate Planning for the Domestic and International Situations, Improve our Diplomatic Work Capabilities" [统筹国内国际两个大局, 提高外交工作能力水平], (speech, Eleventh Meeting of China's Diplomatic Envoys to Foreign Countries, July 17, 2009), in *Selected Works of Hu Jintao Vol. 3* 《胡锦涛文选 第三卷》, (Beijing: CPC Central Committee Document Editing Committee [中共中央文献编辑委员会], 2016), 236-238.

²⁹² "刘赐贵指出, "建设海洋强国"概念进入十八大报告, 在国内外形势复杂的当前具有重要现实意义、战略意义, 是中华民族永续发展、走向世界强国的必由之路。... 在管辖海域外的海洋权益也需要不断加以维护和拓展。这些都需要通过建设海洋强国加以保障。" *Xinhua*, "Liu Cigui: The First Mention of "Maritime Great Power" in the 18th CCP Party Congress Work Report is of Great Practical and Strategic Significance [刘赐贵:十八大报告首提"海洋强国"具有重要现实和战略意义],

November 10, 2012, http://www.xinhuanet.com/18cpcnc/2012-11/10/c_113656862.htm.

²⁹³ Li Naisheng [李乃胜], "From a Maritime Large Power to a Maritime Great Power [李乃胜: 从海洋大国到海洋强国]," *Chinese Academy of Sciences* [中国科学院], November 11, 2012, http://www.cas.cn/xw/zjsd/201211/t20121120_3685601.shtml.

assuming power in 2012, Xi presided over a 2013 Politburo group study on increasing the CCP's attention to oceanic affairs and unambiguously declared that becoming a maritime great power was necessary for PRC national rejuvenation.²⁹⁴ In the same speech, Xi struck a veiled bellicose tone when elaborating on resolute protection of maritime rights, saying the CCP needs to balance its interests in regional stability with its interest in safeguarding maritime rights, adjusting this policy to match the PRC's national strength.²⁹⁵ Xi signaled that as the CCP strives for achievement and builds its national power, it would begin to adopt an increasingly confrontational maritime posture against foreign countries, including the United States. This was a tacit shift away from the passive power-building policy characteristic of Jiang Zemin's "period of strategic opportunity": under Xi, the PRC would amass as well as exert power.

Reinforcing these signals, that same year the PRC State Council formed a State Oceanic Commission [国家海洋委员会] under the State Oceanic Administration to "strengthen the holistic planning and comprehensive coordination of maritime affairs" [为加强海洋事务的统筹规划和综合协调] as well as "formulate a new national maritime development strategy" [制定国家海洋发展战].²⁹⁶ The same State Council reforms added a hard edge to this strategic planning by consolidating PRC constabulary and paranaul forces within the newly-created China Coast Guard, merging the State Oceanic Administration's China Maritime Surveillance Force with the

²⁹⁴ "建设海洋强国是中国特色社会主义事业的重要组成部分。党的十八大作出了建设海洋强国的重大部署。实施这一重大部署，对推动经济持续健康发展，对维护国家主权、安全、发展利益，对实现全面建成小康社会目标、进而实现中华民族伟大复兴都具有重大而深远的意义。" *Xinhua*, "Xi Jinping: Increasing Attention to the Ocean, Recognize Oceanic Economic Strategy, Stimulate Construction of China as a Maritime Power, and Unceasingly Secure New Accomplishments [习近平：进一步关心海洋认识海洋经略海洋 推动海洋强国建设不断取得新成就]," July 31, 2013, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-07/31/c_116762285.htm; *People's Daily*, "Central Committee Political Bureau Group Studies (18th) [中央政治局集体学习（十八届）], accessed August 22, 2020, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2012/1119/c352109-19621672.html>.

²⁹⁵ "要统筹维稳和维权两个大局...维护海洋权益和提升综合国力相匹配" *Xinhua*, "Xi Jinping: Increasing Attention to the Ocean, Recognize Oceanic Economic Strategy, Stimulate Construction of China as a Maritime Power, and Unceasingly Secure New Accomplishments [习近平：进一步关心海洋认识海洋经略海洋 推动海洋强国建设不断取得新成就]," July 31, 2013, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-07/31/c_116762285.htm.

²⁹⁶ *Xinhua*, "Authorized Release: The State Council Plan for Institutional Reform and Functional Transformation [授权发布：国务院机构改革和职能转变方案]," March 15, 2013, http://www.gov.cn/2013lh/content_2354443.htm.

Ministry of Public Security's border defense and maritime customs police.²⁹⁷ Official PRC planning documents under Xi's leadership would continue to emphasize the need to transform the PRC into a maritime great power and centralize maritime strategic planning. The 13th Five Year Plan, released in 2016, closes its section on maritime rights and interests with a line referencing strengthening top-level planning of an existing "maritime strategic plan" [加强海洋战略顶层设计]. The 13th Five Year Plan also distinguishes itself from its past two predecessors with greater international security ambitions, referring to the PRC's overseas interests as well as an intention to build a system to protect those interests [海外利益保护体系].²⁹⁸ In 2018, the CCP further empowered the Central Maritime Rights Protection Leading Small Group by elevating it to the Office of Maritime Rights and Interests [海洋权益工作办公室] within the newly-created Office of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission [中央外事工作委员会办公室]. As noted earlier, commissions wield policy decision making power that is denied to leading small groups, which largely serve a policy coordinating function between multiple implementing agencies.²⁹⁹

Like Hu, Xi faced significant continentalist opposition in the PLAGF, and policy documents issued under his leadership continued situating maritime ambitions for the PRC in terms of a holistic land-sea approach: the 13th Five Year Plan and Xi's first Work Report, delivered at the 19th Party Congress in 2017, emphasized adhering to the holistic land-sea approach in making the PRC a maritime great power.³⁰⁰ However, Xi's speeches and guiding

²⁹⁷ *Xinhua*, "Authorized Release: The State Council Plan for Institutional Reform and Functional Transformation [授权发布: 国务院机构改革和职能转变方案]," March 15, 2013, http://www.gov.cn/2013lh/content_2354443.htm.

²⁹⁸ PRC National People's Congress, *Outline of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for Social Development* [社会发展第十三个五年规划纲要], March 17, 2016, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-03/17/content_5054992.htm.

²⁹⁹ See footnote 104.

³⁰⁰ "坚持陆海统筹, 发展海洋经济, 科学开发海洋资源, 保护海洋生态环境, 维护海洋权益, 建设海洋强国" PRC National People's Congress, *Outline of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for Social Development* [社会发展第十三个五年规划纲要], March 17, 2016, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-03/17/content_5054992.htm; "坚持陆海统筹, 加快建设海洋强国" Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era [习近平: 决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告], (speech, Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017), http://www.gov.cn/zhuant/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm.

documents issued under his leadership were also more combative against PLAGF influence. The PRC's Defense White Paper released in 2015 urges that "the traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned," [必须突破重陆轻海的传统思维] closely referencing Li Yihu's 2007 rationale for the holistic land-sea approach.³⁰¹ PLA analysts were keenly aware of Xi's interest in cutting down the size of the PLAGF: in a two-part PLA study on Xi Jinping's thoughts on the military, several papers included repeated reference to language calling for the end of a "big ground force" [大陆军] mentality.³⁰²

Xi's statements and official documents published under his leadership similarly continued Hu's partiality for PLAN investment over PLAGF interests. The 2015 Defense White Paper signaled Xi's strong support for the PLAN's modernization into a blue water navy and explicitly stated that the PLAN will "gradually shift" its focus from "near seas" defense to simultaneous near and far seas protection; since the 2006 Defense White Paper called for extending PLAN strategic depth, all Defense White Papers (issued in 2008, 2010, and 2013) had used the same boilerplate language stipulating that the PLAN has a near seas defense strategy and remains in the course of building capabilities for far seas protection.³⁰³ Even more explicitly, Xi's remarks at the 12th PLAN Party Congress clarified that building a powerful navy is necessary for a world-class military [建设强大的现代化海军是建设世界一流军队的重要标志],

³⁰¹ PRC State Council Information Office, *China's Military Strategy*, May 27, 2015, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm; Li Yihu [李义虎], "From Discrete Sea and Land to a Sea-Land Comprehensive Concept—Re-examining China's Sea and Land Power [从海陆二分到海陆统筹——对中国海陆关系的再审视], *Contemporary International Relations* [《现代国际关系》] 8, (2007), 1-7, <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/97720.html>.

³⁰² John Chen, "Choosing the 'Least Bad Option': Organizational Interests and Change in the PLA Ground Forces," footnote 8, in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders et al., (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 115.

³⁰³ "逐步实现近海防御型向近海防御与远海护卫型结合转变" PRC State Council Information Office, *China's Military Strategy*, May 27, 2015, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm; PRC State Council Information Office, *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces*, April 2013, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/08/23/content_281474982986506.htm; PRC State Council Information Office, *China's National Defense in 2010*, March 2011, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/publications/2017-04/11/content_4778206.htm; PRC State Council Information Office, *China's National Defense in 2008*, January 2009, http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7060059.htm; PRC State Council Information Office, *China's National Defense in 2006*, December 2006, <http://en.people.cn/whitepaper/defense2006/defense2006.html>.

provides strategic support for transforming the PRC into a maritime great power [是建设海洋强国的战略支撑], and is an important component of realizing Chinese national rejuvenation [是实现中华民族伟大复兴中国梦的重要组成部分].³⁰⁴

Xi-era statements and official policy documents demonstrate that the sea power school has prevailed over the land power school at the highest levels of the CCP's consensus-building process. By linking the national objective of becoming a maritime great power to the CCP's grand strategic objective of national rejuvenation, Xi completed the maritime transformation of CCP strategic planning. However, operationalizing the newly accepted maritime vision will require a laborious maritime transformation at the bureaucratic level, including standing down the entrenched interests of the PLAGF. To that end, PRC maritime transformation is not yet complete.

CCP Military Strategy: Toward a World-Class Navy

Xi Jinping's 2017 work report provides the latest iteration of the CCP's "three-step" PLA modernization timeline; according to this timeline, the PLA should "basically realize mechanization" while laying the groundwork for informationization by 2020, "basically realize the modernization of national defense and the military" by 2035, and be a fully-built "world-class military" by midcentury, likely 2049.³⁰⁵ Although the "world-class" designation proliferates CCP and PLA planning documents as well as state media articles, no clear definition exists for what exactly the CCP would consider a world-class military.³⁰⁶ PLAN leaders have undertaken this

³⁰⁴ *Xinhua*, "Xi Jinping: Building a strong modern navy will provide strong support for realizing the Chinese dream of a strong military [习近平: 努力建设一支强大的现代化海军 为实现中国梦强军梦提供坚强力量支撑]," May 24, 2017, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-05/24/content_5196520.htm.

³⁰⁵ Joel Wuthnow, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on "U.S.-China in 2020: Enduring Problems and Emerging Challenges," September 9, 2020, 24-25, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/Wuthnow_Testimony.pdf.

³⁰⁶ For a detailed overview of becoming a "world-class military" as a PLA modernization goal, see M. Taylor Fravel, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on "A 'World-Class' Military: Assessing China's Global Military Ambitions," June 20, 2019, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Fravel_USCC%20Testimony_FINAL.pdf.

charge as one to develop the PLAN into a “world-class navy” [世界一流海军] that is “commensurate with China’s nationhood in the world.”³⁰⁷ As noted earlier, Xi has specified that a world-class navy is necessary for making the PRC a maritime great power and achieving national rejuvenation.³⁰⁸ These ambitions remain distant: the CCP describes the PLA as lagging “far behind the world’s leading militaries” and repeatedly notes an outstanding need to develop a modern maritime military force able to fulfil its mission set, including deterring U.S. operations and being able to “win” conflicts.³⁰⁹ CCP efforts to build PLAN capabilities largely fall into 3 categories: 1) technological and theoretical development, 2) PLAN modernization, and 3) training. This section will overview CCP objectives of PLAN force development “world-class” status before turning to force employment in the service of increasing CCP strategic influence, directly through military diplomacy and indirectly by securing other influence-building policy initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The first area the CCP is has targeted PLAN capabilities for improvement regards technological and theoretical development. The CCP believes the PLA faces risks of “technology surprise” and a “growing technological generation gap” which foster CCP fears that the U.S. will develop innovations which constitute “absolute military superiority.”³¹⁰ To address

³⁰⁷ Shen Jinlong [沈金龙] and Qin Shengxiang[秦生祥], “The People’s Navy: Setting Sail and Forging Ahead at 70 Years” [人民海军：扬帆奋进 70 年], *Qiushi* [求是], April 16, 2019, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2019-04/16/c_1124364140.htm; *China Military Online*, “Top Naval leaders declare to speed up building a world-class navy to deter major rivals,” April 18, 2019, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-04/18/content_9481476.htm.

³⁰⁸ *Xinhua*, “Xi Jinping: Building a strong modern navy will provide strong support for realizing the Chinese dream of a strong military [习近平：努力建设一支强大的现代化海军 为实现中国梦强军梦提供坚强力量支撑],” May 24, 2017, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-05/24/content_5196520.htm.

³⁰⁹ PRC State Council Information Office, *China’s National Defense in the New Era*, July 24, 2019, 6, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm; PRC State Council Information Office, *China’s Military Strategy*, May 27, 2015, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm; Mei Shixiong [梅世雄], “Comprehensively Improve Warfighting Abilities in the New Era, Strategically Support the Realization of the Chinese Dream, Chairman Xi Inspection of the Joint Operations Combat Center Arouses Strong Reactions from the Military and Armed Police Force” [全面提高新时代备战打仗能力，为实现中国梦提供战略支撑——习主席视察军委联合作战指挥中心在全军和武警部队引起强烈反响], *Xinhua*, November 5, 2017, http://news.cnr.cn/native/gd/20171105/t20171105_524012802.shtml.

³¹⁰ PRC State Council Information Office, *China’s National Defense in the New Era*, July 24, 2019, 6, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm.

these challenges, the CCP has directed the PLA to improve its technological innovation capabilities.³¹¹ In pursuit of greater military technological innovation, the CCP in the Xi era is taking a two-pronged approach, including its 2016 National Innovation-Driven Development Strategy [国家创新驱动发展战略], which directs political capital toward prioritizing potentially dual-use technological innovation in the course of economic development, and a military-civil fusion [军民融合] initiative to guide corporate and local government investment in China toward dual-use sectors.³¹² Xi has personally endorsed these efforts in his speeches, urging the PLA to develop and leverage emerging technologies as a component of broader PLA modernization.³¹³ These efforts are not new; the PRC has put forward centrally-planned strategies to advance technological innovation with a focus on dual-use technologies since the release of the Medium and Long-Term Defense Science and Technology Development Plan in 2006.³¹⁴ The parallel plans' significance is the introduction of the obvious military objectives driving the CCP's interest in technological innovation. The 2016 National Innovation-Driven Development Strategy sets milestones paralleling the PLA's three-step modernization timeline, aiming for the PRC to be an "innovation nation" by 2020, an international leader of innovation by 2030, and a "world great power of scientific and technological innovation" [建成世界科技创新强国] by 2050.³¹⁵

³¹¹ Joel Wuthnow, "China's 'New' Academy of Military Science: A Revolution in Theoretical Affairs?" *China Brief*, January 18, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-new-academy-of-military-science-a-revolution-in-theoretical-affairs/>.

³¹² *Xinhua*, "The CCP Central Committee and the State Council Issue the 'Outline For a National Innovation-Driven Development Strategy'" [中共中央 国务院印发《国家创新驱动发展战略纲要》], May 19, 2016, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2016-05/19/content_5074812.htm; *Securities Times* [证券时报], "Military-Civil Fusion Development Committee Established, Military Industrial Sector Welcomes a Serious Advantage" [军民融合发展委成立 军工板块再迎重磅利好], January 23, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/2017-01/23/c_129458492.htm; Greg Levesque, "Military-Civil Fusion: Beijing's 'Guns AND Butter' Strategy to Become a Technological Superpower," October 8, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/military-civil-fusion-beijings-guns-and-butter-strategy-to-become-a-technological-superpower/>.

³¹³ See Elsa B. Kania, "Chinese Military Innovation in the AI Revolution," *The RUSI Journal* 164 nos. 5/6 (2019), 26-34, 26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2019.1693803>.

³¹⁴ Tai Ming Cheung et al., "Planning for Innovation: Understanding China's Plans for Technological, Energy, Industrial and Defense Development," University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, September 2016, 24, <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Planning%20for%20Innovation%20-%20Understanding%20China's%20Plans%20for%20Tech%20Energy%20Industrial%20and%20Defense%20Development072816.pdf>.

³¹⁵ *Xinhua*, "The CCP Central Committee and the State Council Issue the 'Outline For a National Innovation-Driven

The second category of CCP efforts regards PLAN modernization. Ongoing PLA reforms demonstrate CCP expectations that a modernized PLAN must be capable of: blue-water power projection as well as achieving joint operational synergies with other PLA services, including the CCG and People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM).³¹⁶

PLA strategists understand blue-water projection as pushing the PLA "strategic front-line" further from China's shores and securing strategic depth.³¹⁷ This process involves improving PLAN warship quantity and quality. By sheer hull count, PLAN shipbuilding has proceeded at an impressive rate, with Chinese shipyards launching 10 destroyers in 2019, illuminating scale to the shipbuilding effort which also includes launching eight of the flagship Type 055 destroyers in just over three years (August 2017 to August 2020).³¹⁸ PLAN destroyers also feature capabilities approximate to those of their U.S. counterparts: while expert analysts consider the PLAN Type 052D destroyer inferior to the U.S. Navy's *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyer, the PLAN's Type 055 destroyer is widely considered to have capabilities exceeding any *Arleigh Burke*.³¹⁹ The PLAN's pursuit of improved capabilities has opened a gap with the U.S. Navy in terms of ship-launched anti-ship missiles. PLAN guided missile destroyers,

Development Strategy" [中共中央 国务院印发《国家创新驱动发展战略纲要》], May 19, 2016, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2016-05/19/content_5074812.htm. For a detailed overview of PLA innovation goals established around the National Innovation-Driven Development Strategy, see Katherine Koleski, "The 13th Five-Year Plan," *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, February 14, 2017, 6-14, [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/The%2013th%20Five-Year%20Plan_Final_2.14.17_Updated%20\(002\).pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/The%2013th%20Five-Year%20Plan_Final_2.14.17_Updated%20(002).pdf).

³¹⁶ Ian Burns McCaslin and Andrew S. Erickson, "The Impact of Xi-Era Reforms on the Chinese Navy," in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders, Arthur S. Ding, Andrew Scobell, Andrew N.D. Yang, and Joel Wuthnow, (Washington: National Defense University Press, 2019), 128.

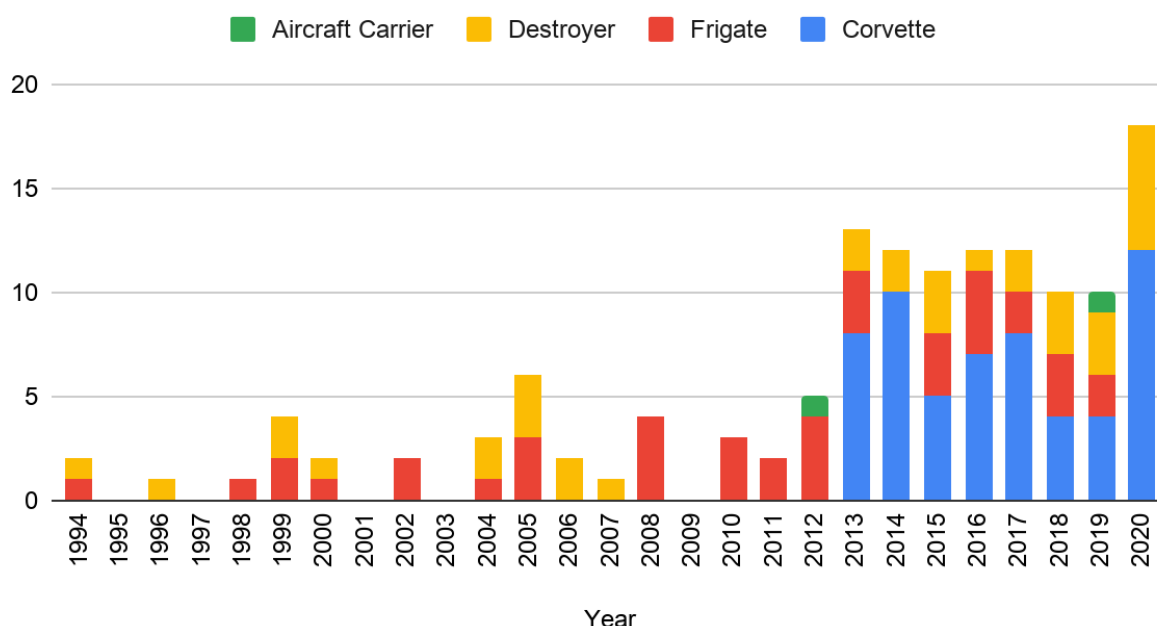
³¹⁷ Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), 209; Christopher P. Carlson and Jack Bianchi, "Warfare Drivers: Mission Needs and the Impact on Ship Design" in *Chinese Naval Shipbuilding: An Ambitious and Uncertain Course*, ed. Andrew S. Erickson, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2016), 24.

³¹⁸ Xavier Vavasaur, "China Launched The 24th Type 052D, 6th Type 055 & 71st Type 056 Vessels For PLAN," *Naval News*, December 30, 2019, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2019/12/china-launched-the-24th-type-052d-6th-type-055-71st-type-056-vessels-for-plan/>; Xavier Vavasaur, "Shipyard In China Launched The 25th Type 052D And 8th Type 055 Destroyers For PLAN," *Naval News*, August 30, 2020, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2020/08/shipyard-in-china-launched-the-25th-type-052d-and-8th-type-055-destroyers-for-plan/>.

³¹⁹ Kyle Mizokami, "This Is What a Real Naval Buildup Looks Like," *Popular Mechanics*, June 5, 2018, <https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/weapons/a21086031/china-naval-build-up/>; Daniel Caldwell, Joseph Freda, and Lyle J. Goldstein, "China Maritime Report No. 5: China's Dreadnought? The PLA Navy's Type 055 Cruiser and Its Implications for the Future Maritime Security Environment," *U.S. Naval War College*, February 2020, 2 & 7-12, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/5/>.

particularly the Type 052C, Type 052D, and Type 055 are equipped with YJ-18 anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCM) boasting operational ranges of 290 nautical miles and HQ-9 anti-air missiles (80 nm).³²⁰ The U.S. Navy, which equips its warships with the Harpoon ASCM featuring an operational range under 80 nautical miles, has had to invest resources to improving their anti-ship missile capabilities to close this gap.³²¹

Figure 1: PLAN Warships Commissioned, 1994-2019



Sources: Jane's Fighting Ships, accessed December 10, 2020; Congressional Research Service, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress* RL33153, August 1, 2018, 36-38, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33153/222>.

Parallel to building a surface combatant force structure capable of blue-water projection, the PLAN has also been modernizing its fleet of supply ships for replenishment-at-sea, which

³²⁰ U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2015), 10.; *China Military Online*, "Top Naval leaders declare to speed up building a world-class navy to deter major rivals," April 23, 2019, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-04/18/content_9481476.htm; Christopher P. Carlson and Jack Bianchi, "Warfare Drivers: Mission Needs and the Impact on Ship Design" in *Chinese Naval Shipbuilding: An Ambitious and Uncertain Course*, ed. Andrew S. Erickson, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2016), 32; Alex Pape and Tate Nurkin, "China's Naval Strength" in *Chinese Naval Shipbuilding: An Ambitious and Uncertain Course*, ed. Andrew S. Erickson, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2016) 130.

³²¹ James R. Holmes, "The US Navy's Cruise Missile Nightmare," *RealClearDefense*, February 20, 2015, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2015/02/20/the_us_navys_cruise_missile_nightmare__107640.html; John Grady, "Entire Navy Tomahawk Missile Arsenal Will Upgrade To Block V," January 22, 2020, <https://news.usni.org/2020/01/22/entire-navy-tomahawk-missile-arsenal-will-upgrade-to-block-v>.

remains a known capability gap in the PLAN.³²² Analysis from *Jane's* has found that the Type 903A and Type 901 PLAN supply ships currently have the capacity and speed, and are being produced at a rate such that the PLAN will soon also have the requisite number, to enable expeditionary operations.³²³

Joint operational capability is an acknowledged PLA weakness.³²⁴ CCP efforts to rectify this include rebalancing the service blend among students in military education and increasing PLA participation in international military exercises, but demonstrated technological and operational capabilities for joint operations remain nascent; the PLAN only received its first command and decision-capable vessel in 2019, and the PLA at large appears to still be experimenting with different command information networks at the brigade level, suggesting the military is not yet equipped for joint command across an integrated interservice command information network.³²⁵ While PLAN coordination with other PLA services appears weak, PLAN coordination with the CCG and PAFMM remains a distinct strength; PLAN-CCG-PAFMM coordination has markedly increased following incorporation of the paramilitaries into the PLA command structure and ongoing interaction between the services.³²⁶ The PRC has also taken steps to strengthen legal authorities for the CCG's use of force in 2020 by passing a revised PAP Law permitting PLA-PAP joint exercises for noncombat operations, offering new legal

³²² Bernard D. Cole, "China's navy expands its replenishment-at-sea capability," *theinterpreter* August 26, 2015.; "Chinese military exploring new ways of replenishment support at sea," *Xinhua*, December 2, 2019.

³²³ Chad Peltier, *China's Logistics Capabilities for Expeditionary Operations*, Jane's, April 15, 2020, 40, <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/China%20Expeditionary%20Logistics%20Capabilities%20Report.pdf>.

³²⁴ *PLA Daily*, "Remodeling the System, Surging Forward with a New Bureau" [体系重塑，波澜壮阔开新局], December 8, 2018, http://www.81.cn/jfbmap/content/2018-12/18/content_223416.html/.

³²⁵ Ian Burns McCaslin and Andrew S. Erickson, "The Impact of Xi-Era Reforms on the Chinese Navy," in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders, Arthur S. Ding, Andrew Scobell, Andrew N.D. Yang, and Joel Wuthnow, (Washington: National Defense University Press, 2019), 138-140.; *China Military Online*, "China debuts most powerful destroyer in celebrations," April 24, 2019, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-04/24/content_9486938.htm. On the PLA's experiments with command information networks, see Yang Yawen [杨雅雯], Xiao Zhenhua [肖振华], and Sun Bo [孙波], "Create a 'Multi-Network Integrated' Smart Barracks--Rocket Force's 'First Conventional Brigade' Strengthens the Record of Information Network Building [打造“多网一体”智慧军营——火箭军“常规导弹第一旅”加强信息网络建设记事], *Xinhua*, September 24, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-09/24/c_1126537025.htm.

³²⁶ Conor M. Kennedy and Andrew S. Erickson, "China Maritime Report No. 1: China's Third Sea Force, The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia: Tethered to the PLA," U.S. Naval War College, March 2017, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/1/>; McCaslin and Erickson in Saunders et al. 2019, p. 148.

authorities for the CCG to take constabulary action pursuant to securing the PRC's interpretation of its maritime rights, and drafting a Coast Guard Law offering limited discretion for the CCG to fire its weapons on foreign vessels if justified as a police action.³²⁷

The final category of CCP efforts to build a world-class navy regards PLAN training. The PLA assesses its officers as lacking combat experience, resulting in the “Five Cannots” [五个不能]: they cannot 1) judge the situation, 2) understand superiors' intention, 3) make operational decisions, 4) deploy troops, or 5) handle surprises.³²⁸ The PLA solution is leadership training, and their sense of progress can be tallied in frequency of term use.³²⁹ PLA servicemen broadly lack combat experience as well, which the PLA is attempting to remedy with virtual reality training experiences and increased peacekeeping deployments to the Gulf of Aden.³³⁰

A world-class PLA would offer the CCP an effective tool for realizing the CCP's envisioned new model of interstate relations by acting as a potent tool able to displace the U.S. alliance structure insofar and erode U.S. strategic influence in and beyond the Indo-Pacific

³²⁷ As part of a 2018 government reorganization, the PAP assumed command over the CCG. As such, the 2020 PAP law permitting joint PLA-PAP exercises also provides legal authority for joint PLAN-CCG exercises. Although the exercises permitted under the 2020 PAP law does not include wartime combat operations, joint MOOTW exercises build important experience and command structures that will support interoperability in wartime. For the 2020 PAP law, see PRC Ministry of Justice, *People's Armed Police Law of the People's Republic of China* [中华人民共和国人民武装警察法], June 20, 2020, http://www.moj.gov.cn/Department/content/2020-06/22/592_3251131.html. For an analysis on the 2020 PAP law's granting of authority for the CCG to take constabulary action to secure maritime rights, see Zhu Ziyang [朱紫阳], “China's Coast Guard has carried out a series of special law enforcement actions to ensure maritime security and stability” [中国海警系列专项执法行动 保障海上安全稳定], *People's Daily*, June 22, 2020, <http://legal.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0622/c42510-31755823.html>. For the draft Coast Guard Law authorizing the CCG to fire on foreign vessels, see the draft Coast Guard Law available at Wei Changhao, “NPCSC Solicits Public Comments on Draft Coast Guard Law,” *NPC Observer*, November 4, 2020, <https://npcobserver.com/2020/11/04/npcsc-solicits-public-comments-on-draft-coast-guard-law/>.

³²⁸ *PLA Daily*, “To Solve the ‘Five Cannots’ Problem, Start From the Source” [破解‘五个不会’难题要从源头入手], October 13, 2015, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2015-10/13/content_125880.htm; Dennis J. Blasko, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on Backlash from Abroad: The Limits of Beijing's Power to Shape its External Environment, February 7, 2019, 3, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Blasko_USCC%20Testimony_FINAL.pdf.

³²⁹ Dennis J. Blasko, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on Backlash from Abroad: The Limits of Beijing's Power to Shape its External Environment, February 7, 2019, 9, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Blasko_USCC%20Testimony_FINAL.pdf.

³³⁰ Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, *Six Years at Sea...And Counting: Gulf of Aden Anti-Piracy and China's Maritime Commons Presence*, (Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2015), 40-44 & 115-118; Timothy R. Heath, “China's Military Has No Combat Experience: Does It Matter?” *The RAND Blog*, November 27, 2018, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2018/11/chinas-military-has-no-combat-experience-does-it-matter.html>; *China Military Online*, “Top Naval leaders declare to speed up building a world-class navy to deter major rivals,” April 23, 2019, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-04/18/content_9481476.htm.

region. The Indo-Pacific is the key theater which the CCP intends to reorder as its community of shared future for mankind.³³¹ Xi's speeches and CCP documents discussed earlier identify the CCP's interest in diminishing the region's U.S.-centric regional security architecture as Xi urged in his 2014 speech at CICA and replacing it with regional multilateral institutions which do not rise to the level of military alliance.³³² To achieve these goals, PLAN is tasked with developing a "balanced, stable, open and inclusive Asian security architecture" to displace the "hegemon[ic]" U.S. regional alliance network.³³³ The PLAN does so by leading international military exercises and security dialogues which exclude the United States; PLA military diplomacy emphasizes Asia, where nearly half of all such interactions occur.³³⁴ As shown in Figure 2 below, Asia remains the PLA's primary focus for military diplomacy.

³³¹ Jacob Mardell, "The 'Community of Common Destiny' in Xi Jinping's New Era" *The Diplomat* October 25, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/the-community-of-common-destiny-in-xi-jinpings-new-era/>.

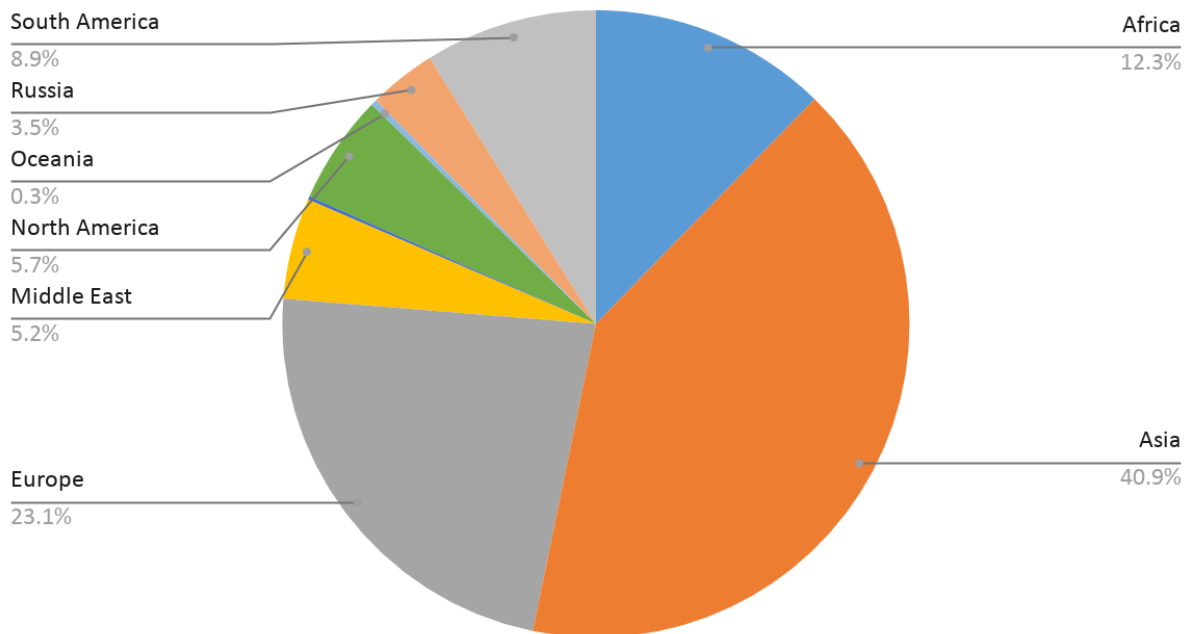
³³² The *China and the World in the New Era* white paper specifically defines the community of shared future for mankind and the new model of interstate relations as having partnerships rather than alliances. PRC State Council Information Office, *China and the World in the New Era*, September 27, 2019, 33-34, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html; For Xi's 2014 speech, see Xi Jinping, "New Asian Security Concept For New Progress in Security Cooperation," (speech, Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, May 21, 2014), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1159951.shtml.

For CCP documents urging states move toward a partnership-driven security arrangement rather than one which includes alliances, see, PRC State Council Information Office, *China's National Defense in the New Era*, July 24, 2019, 31-32, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm.

³³³ PRC State Council Information Office, *China's National Defense in the New Era*, July 24, 2019, 4, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm.

³³⁴ PRC State Council Information Office, *China's National Defense in the New Era*, July 24, 2019, 34-35, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm; Kenneth Allen, Phillip C. Saunders, and John Chen, *Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003-2016: Trends and Implications*, (Washington: National Defense University Press, 2017), 11, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-11.pdf?ver=2017-07-17-153301-093>.

Figure 2: Senior-Level Military Visits Abroad by Geographic Region, 2002-2019



Source: Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, *Chinese Military Diplomacy Database* version 3.0 (Washington, DC: National Defense University, June 22, 2010).

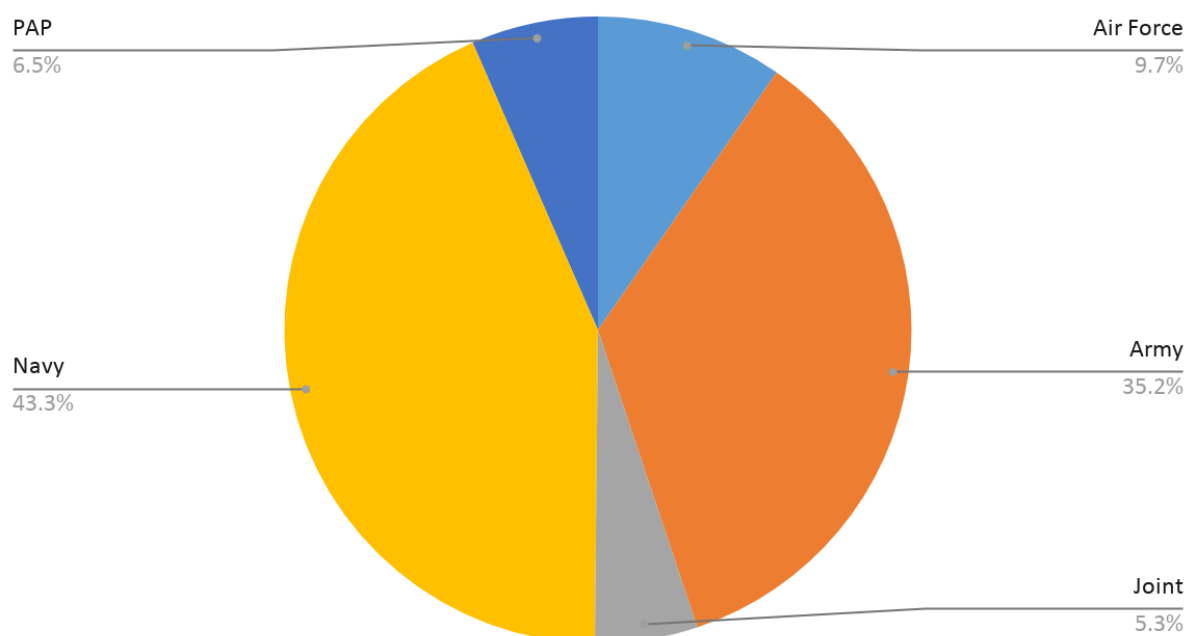
In China's far seas, CCP documents describe reshaping the global superstructure from one of "Cold war mentality and power politics" to one which reapportions greater power to non-Western, developing countries and displaces military alliances with dialogue-driven partnerships.³³⁵ The PLA's role in building this new model of international relations is primarily military diplomacy, which the CCP hopes will build international support for its preferred rules of behavior.³³⁶ As shown in Figure 3 below, the PLAN is a significant driver of the PRC's military diplomacy, leading a plurality of international exercises over the past two decades. The PLAN's importance has continued to grow over time: looking at only 2019 data, the PLAN accounts for a full 50% of the PLA's international military exercises.³³⁷

³³⁵ PRC State Council Information Office, *China and the World in the New Era*, September 27, 2019, 32-33, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html.

³³⁶ Kenneth Allen, Phillip C. Saunders, and John Chen, *Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003-2016: Trends and Implications*, (Washington: National Defense University Press, 2017), 5, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-11.pdf?ver=2017-07-17-153301-093>.

³³⁷ Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, *Chinese Military Diplomacy Database* version 3.0 (Washington, DC: National Defense University, June 22, 2010).

Figure 3: Total PLA International Military Exercises by Service, 2002-2019



Source: Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, *Chinese Military Diplomacy Database* version 3.0 (Washington, DC: National Defense University, June 22, 2010).

Although the PLAN's functional effort in the far seas is largely the same as in the near seas, the strategic environment in which the PLAN is building its partnerships is decidedly different, as PLAN strategy dictates an "active posture" in the near seas and a "reactive posture" in the far seas, which makes the far seas a less complex security environment for PLA military diplomacy.³³⁸ The CCP more readily quantifies far-seas diplomatic engagements and measures progress by number of: countries participating in exchanges; PRC military attaché offices established abroad; foreign attaché offices in China; and defense dialogue mechanisms in place.³³⁹ The CCP shows steady progress as more countries engage the PLA and more engagements become more combat-oriented with deterrence potential.³⁴⁰

³³⁸ M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 232.

³³⁹ PRC State Council Information Office, *China's National Defense in the New Era*, July 24, 2019, 31-32, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm.

³⁴⁰ Kenneth Allen, Phillip C. Saunders, and John Chen, *Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003-2016: Trends and Implications*, (Washington: National Defense University Press, 2017), 58, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-11.pdf?ver=2017-07-17-153301-093>.

While not explicitly discussed in Defense White Papers, the PLAN also appears to advance CCP strategic influence abroad by safeguarding the Belt and Road Initiative and by taking advantage of dual-use investments associated with the BRI to extend PLA reach. Xi Jinping first proposed the initiative as a massive infrastructure investment campaign ostensibly leveraging Chinese capital and labor to improve nodes of connectivity with China's neighbors and enhance economic exchange and joint development.³⁴¹ The BRI is not simply a means for the PRC to unload excess capital: notably, CCP sources describe the BRI as a "strategy."³⁴² The BRI has become a framework for Chinese economic leadership abroad, and the CCP advances BRI objectives in the belief that improved infrastructure will foster increased economic integration, which fosters regional cooperation in turn.³⁴³ The BRI is also an opportunity for the PLA to expand global military access and build military-to-military contacts with countries beyond the Indo-Pacific. This military goal is among Xi's explicitly-stated objectives for the BRI: in a 2019 address to the Central Party School, Xi described protection of the PRC's overseas interests as an "imperative" to be addressed by building a "security guarantee system for the Belt and Road Initiative."³⁴⁴

BRI investments have included commercial seaport facilities with limited dual-use applications which appear to be what PLA strategic documents consider "strategic strongpoints," i.e. PRC-controlled ports which in times of crisis can offer limited forward basing

³⁴¹ *Xinhua*, "Xi elaborates on inspiration behind Belt and Road Initiative," May 15, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/15/c_136285408.htm.

³⁴² Liu Shaoyong [刘绍勇], "Actively Integrate the Belt and Road Initiative Strategy and Develop the Aerial Silk Road" [主动融入'一带一路'战略 积极打造空中丝绸之路], *Qiushi*, February 28, 2017, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2017-02/28/c_1120536650.htm; Joel Wuthnow, "China's Belt and Road: One Initiative, Three Strategies" in *Strategic Asia 2019: China's Expanding Strategic Ambitions*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills, (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2019), 212.

³⁴³ Chen Jimin, "Correctly Understand the Belt and Road Initiative" [正确认识"一带一路"], 《学习时报》[Study Times], February 26, 2018, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0226/c40531-29834263.html>; *Xinhua*, "Authorized Release: Promoting the Vision and Operations of Collectively Constructing the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road" [授权发布:推动共建丝绸之路经济带和 21 世纪海上丝绸之路的愿景与行动], March 28, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2015-03/28/c_1114793986.htm.

³⁴⁴ *Xinhua*, "Xi urges major risk prevention to ensure healthy economy, social stability," January 22, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-01/22/c_137763248.htm.

services such as replenishment.³⁴⁵ According to the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, the PRC has already successfully leveraged economic cooperation through the BRI to secure PLA access in foreign airfields.³⁴⁶ Similarly, the port of Gwadar, among the BRI's largest investments, is designed with specifications that could feasibly support the largest PLAN vessels and does regularly support Pakistan Navy vessels purchased from the PRC.³⁴⁷ The PLAN itself has not yet used Gwadar as an overseas base, however, and despite the CCP's broad efforts to derive military benefit from overseas investments, developing the requisite facilities and infrastructure for a military presence has remained a persistent challenge.³⁴⁸

V. Competitor: USG Maritime Interests and Operations

The United States uses military power to secure enduring interests of physical security, economic growth, and free democratic institutions by defending these same interests abroad, creating what observers commonly term the “liberal” or “rules-based” international order.³⁴⁹ In other words, the United States projects power globally to create environments in which U.S. interests are secured, and challenging that global power projection or reshaping the environment correspondingly threatens U.S. interests. American power shapes a global status quo defined by imperfectly implemented principles such as free trade and democratic values across the globe, and one underpinned by forward military basing in allied countries and

³⁴⁵ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2019 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2019, 298-300. On strategic strongpoints, see Conor Kennedy, “Strategic Strong Points and Chinese Naval Strategy,” *China Brief*, March 22, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/strategic-strong-points-and-chinese-naval-strategy/>.

³⁴⁶ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2020 Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020, 403.

³⁴⁷ On Gwadar's status as a BRI investment, see Jacob Mardell, “The BRI in Pakistan: China's flagship economic corridor,” *Mercator Institute for China Studies*, May 20, 2020, <https://merics.org/en/analysis/bri-pakistan-chinas-flagship-economic-corridor>. On Gwadar as a potential strategic strongpoint or overseas PLAN base, see Isaac B. Kardon, Conor M. Kennedy, and Peter A. Dutton, “China Maritime Report No. 7: Gwadar: China's Potential Strategic Strongpoint in Pakistan,” *China Maritime Studies Institute*, 2020, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/7>.

³⁴⁸ Maria Abi-Habib, “China's ‘Belt and Road’ Plan in Pakistan Takes a Military Turn,” *New York Times*, December 19, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/19/world/asia/pakistan-china-belt-road-military.html>; Toshi Yoshihara, “Trouble Finding Partners: Barriers to China's Overseas Basing,” *China Brief*, January 12, 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/trouble-finding-partners-barriers-to-chinas-overseas-basing/>.

³⁴⁹ Commission on the National Defense Strategy for the United States, “Providing for the Common Defense: The Assessment and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission,” November 2018, 4, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/providing-for-the-common-defense.pdf>.

command of the commons, by which the U.S. military can project to any theater to secure its interests.³⁵⁰ States enacting foreign policies that appear to challenge the international status quo are thus “revisionist” powers, and the prospect that the PRC is a revisionist state has endured for decades.³⁵¹ USG documents during the Trump Administration began referring to the PRC as a “revisionist” power.³⁵² While the Biden Administration has not used the same term, its Interim National Security Guidance similarly characterizes the PRC as undermining “the rules and values at the heart of an open and stable international system.”³⁵³

The USG secures American interests by denying efforts at revisionism. The USG has 3 key objectives to deny revisionist activities: to 1) develop competitive advantages, 2) defend the rules-based international order, and 3) preserve American strategic influence. Each objective is available in public strategy documents: The 2017 National Security Strategy stipulates that the USG must increase its competitive advantages vis-à-vis the PRC, particularly in operations “below the threshold of open military conflict.”³⁵⁴ The 2019 DOD Indo-Pacific Strategy Report accuses the CCP of undermining the region’s rules-based international order.³⁵⁵ Finally, the U.S. Navy’s mission includes preserving U.S. strategic influence by deterring aggression and defeating adversaries should deterrence fail.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁰ Hal Brands, *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), 9-11.

³⁵¹ Alastair Iain Johnston, “Is China a Status Quo Power?” *International Security* 27, no. 4 (2003), 5-56, https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/johnston_spring_2003.pdf; Feng Huiyun, “Is China a Revisionist Power?” *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 2, iss. 3, (2009), 313-334, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pop003>.

³⁵² U.S. White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 18, 2017, 25, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

³⁵³ U.S. White House, *Interim National Security Guidance*, March 2021, 20, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.

³⁵⁴ U.S. White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 18, 2017, 27-28, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

³⁵⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019, cover letter, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

³⁵⁶ U.S. Navy, *A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority: Version 2.0*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Navy, 2018), 1, https://www.navy.mil/navydata/people/cno/Richardson/Resource/Design_2.0.pdf.

These objectives are the latest iteration of a U.S. grand strategy that has remained largely consistent since its formation during the Cold War: U.S. grand strategy shifted from “containment” of the Soviet Union to “primacy” across economic, military, and diplomatic lines of effort in building and subsequently maintaining a world order in which American power is preponderant.³⁵⁷ Despite undulations between administrations favoring far-reaching maximalist foreign policies and those favoring global retrenchment, which one scholar-practitioner observes arises because “almost every new occupant of the Oval Office thought the world had changed in some fundamental way that his predecessor either totally misunderstood or failed to manage effectively,” this cycle of maximalist-retrenchment foreign policies consistently circled debates over how best to manage the accepted fact of U.S. primacy.³⁵⁸

Sustaining U.S. Primacy

Michael Green’s comprehensive survey of U.S. policy in Asia demonstrates a “central theme” contiguous over time: “that the United States will not tolerate any other power establishing exclusive hegemonic control over Asia or the Pacific,” and in line with this theme, U.S. policy has made the USG the “preeminent power in the Pacific.”³⁵⁹ That is, USG has denied the rise of regional hegemonies in the Indo-Pacific with policies in pursuit of U.S. primacy. President Donald Trump’s administration considered maintaining “U.S. strategic primacy in the Indo-Pacific region” its primary national security challenge in the region.³⁶⁰ The USG sustains its primacy and meets its key objectives for the maritime balance via 3 operational objectives: 1)

³⁵⁷ Patrick Porter, “Why America’s Grand Strategy Has Not Changed,” *International Security*, 42, no. 4 (2018), 9-46, https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/isec_a_00311. For detailed accounts of the United States’ approach to primacy, or “unipolarity,” see Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Hal Brands, “Choosing Primacy: U.S. Strategy and Global Order at the Dawn of the Post-Cold War Era,” *Texas National Security Review* 1, iss. 2, (March 1, 2018), 8-33, <https://tnsr.org/2018/02/choosing-primacy-u-s-strategy-global-order-dawn-post-cold-war-era-2/>.

³⁵⁸ Stephen Sestanovich, *Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), 7.

³⁵⁹ Michael J. Green, *By More than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific Since 1783*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 4-5.

³⁶⁰ U.S. National Security Council, “U.S. Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific,” <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/IPS-Final-Declass.pdf/>.

increase the U.S. military's margin of superiority vis-à-vis its competitors, 2) expand and integrate its network of allies and partners, and 3) demonstrate political resolve.

Regarding the first operational objective, the USG is developing new military capabilities and operational concepts to maintain its margin of military superiority. Following the Cold War, the U.S. has enjoyed military superiority sufficient for hegemonic leadership in every region of the world.³⁶¹ This overmatching superiority underpins a denial strategy that constrains the ambitions of would-be regional hegemony, with advanced military capabilities and operational concepts that leverage forward operating bases and technological advantages.³⁶² DoD considers forces based in-theater integral for achieving U.S. strategic goals insofar as they deter adversaries, enable immediate response to aggression, and prevent tactical losses which would require the USG to transition strategies from denial to punishment or rollback.³⁶³ Similarly, every U.S. National Security Strategy since 2000 prioritizes maintaining U.S. technological leadership.³⁶⁴

While progress on new technologies remains classified, USG efforts toward developing new operational concepts have been pronounced. The U.S. national defense policy community has responded to the National Defense Strategy Commission's urgent call for new operational

³⁶¹ Hal Brands, "Choosing Primacy: U.S. Strategy and Global Order at the Dawn of the Post-Cold War Era," *Texas National Security Review* 1, iss. 2, (March 1, 2018), 8-33, <https://tnsr.org/2018/02/choosing-primacy-u-s-strategy-global-order-dawn-post-cold-war-era-2/>.

³⁶² Evan B. Montgomery, "Reinforcing the Front Line: U.S. Defense Strategy and the Rise of China," Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, February 1, 2017, <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/reinforcing-the-front-line-u.s.-defense-strategy-and-the-rise-of-china/publication/1>; Michael J. Green, *By More Than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific Since 1783*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 5; Hal Brands, *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), 11 & 27-28.

³⁶³ Michael J. Lostumbo et al., *Overseas Basing of U.S. Military Forces: An Assessment of Relative Costs*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013), 287-288, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR201.html; U.S. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, DOD INSTRUCTION 3000.12 MANAGEMENT OF U.S. GLOBAL DEFENSE POSTURE (GDP), 2017, 6, <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/300012p.pdf>.

³⁶⁴ U.S. White House, A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement, 1996, 13, <http://nssarchive.us/national-security-strategy-1996/>; U.S. White House, The National Security Strategy, 2002, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/nss9.html>; U.S. White House, National Security Strategy, 2015, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy_2.pdf; U.S. White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 18, 2017, 20-22 & 26-28, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

concepts.³⁶⁵ For the Pacific theater, for example, DoD leadership considered operationalizing a maritime pressure strategy involving deployment of survivable, land-based precision-strike networks within the PLA long-range strike threat envelope.³⁶⁶ The USG has made a priority of developing new strategic and operational concepts for maritime competition with the PRC: the FY2019 National Defense Authorization Act required the President to submit a whole-of-government strategy for competition with the PRC, including the use of military means available to the CCP to affect the United States and its allies.³⁶⁷ Similarly, U.S. military services are making concerted efforts to reimagine and retool themselves for strategic competition with the PRC: U.S. Navy has planned large-scale exercises in 2021 to test new operational concepts to frustrate Chinese surveillance capabilities, the U.S. Marine Corps has released a radical new force design concept to become a naval expeditionary force extending threat over the CCP's naval and missile assets, and the U.S. Army is investing in long-range maritime strike capabilities.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵ Commission on the National Defense Strategy for the United States, "Providing for the Common Defense: The Assessment and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission," 2018, viii, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2018/11/providing-common-defense>.

³⁶⁶ Thomas G. Mahnken et al., "Tightening the Chain: Implementing a Strategy of Maritime Pressure in the Western Pacific," Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, May 23, 2019, <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/implementing-a-strategy-of-maritime-pressure-in-the-western-pacific/publication/1>; Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "Pentagon Chief in Favor of Deploying U.S. Missiles to Asia" *The New York Times*, August 3, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/world/asia/us-missiles-asia-esper.html>.

³⁶⁷ U.S. Congress, John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 Sec. 1261, <https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/hr5515/BILLS-115hr5515enr.pdf>.

³⁶⁸ David B. Larer, "With China gunning for aircraft carriers, US Navy says it must change how it fights," *DefenseNews*, December 6, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2019/12/06/with-china-gunning-for-aircraft-carriers-the-us-navy-says-it-must-change-the-way-it-fights/>; Megan Eckstein, "Large Scale Exercise 2020 Will Be Postponed Amid COVID-19 Pandemic Concerns," *USNI News*, March 25, 2020, <https://news.usni.org/2020/03/25/large-scale-exercise-2020-will-be-postponed-amid-covid-19-pandemic-concerns>; U.S. Marine Corps, *Force Design 2030*, March 2020, <https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Docs/CMC38%20Force%20Design%202030%20Report%20Phase%20I%20and%20II.pdf?ver=2020-03-26-121328-460>; Michael R. Gordon, "Marines Plan to Retool to Meet China Threat," *Wall Street Journal*, March 22, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/marines-plan-to-retool-to-meet-china-threat-11584897014>; Jen Judson, "US Army to prioritize long-range missile capability to go after maritime targets," *DefenseNews*, March 26, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/global-force-symposium/2019/03/26/army-to-prioritize-long-range-missile-capability-to-go-after-maritime-targets/>; David Lague, "Special Report: U.S. rearms to nullify China's missile supremacy," *Reuters*, May 6, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-missiles-specialreport-us/special-report-u-s-rearms-to-nullify-chinas-missile-supremacy-idUSKBN221EQ>.

The USG's second operational objective is to expand and integrate the U.S. alliance network. The USG considers its network of allies and partners a "force multiplier" for deterrence and interoperable³⁶⁹ warfighting capability and is working to thicken its ties with regional allies.³⁷⁰ The U.S. alliance network in the Indo-Pacific is a series of bilateral security guarantees; as such, factors which reassure allies such as demonstrated military capability or preparedness meaningfully contribute to Pacific alliance cohesion insofar as they assure allies of the U.S. military's ability to deter or prevail over an adversary.³⁷¹ To reassure allies in the face of PLA naval modernization, DoD is preparing for high-end competition through procurement of advanced platforms.³⁷² DoD is also evolving in-theater U.S. force posture by expanding defense cooperation with Pacific Island nations, for example recently partnering with the Australian government to develop a naval base on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island.³⁷³ This effort signals an extension of existing U.S. commitments to Pacific Island nations, in particular the Compact of Free Association, which offers U.S. security guarantees in exchange for military access and basing.³⁷⁴

The U.S. is also promoting increased U.S. military interoperability with its allies and partners as well as between U.S.-allied militaries; while these efforts thicken the United States'

³⁶⁹ Interoperability is the relative ability of different nations' militaries and their organizational structures to work together and achieve each nation's objective.

³⁷⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019, 16, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

³⁷¹ Victor Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 3.

³⁷² U.S. Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019, 16-20, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

³⁷³ Katharine Murphy, "America to partner with Australia to develop naval base on Manus Island" *The Guardian*, November 17, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/nov/18/america-to-partner-with-australia-to-develop-naval-base-on-manus-island>; *Radio New Zealand*, "Australia and PNG sign Lombrum naval base deal" March 19, 2019, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/385115/australia-and-png-sign-lombrum-naval-base-deal>.

³⁷⁴ Derek Grossman et al., *America's Pacific Island Allies: The Freely Associated States and Chinese Influence*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2019), 20-21, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2973.html.

security ties, those ties have not reliably increased international political cohesion. U.S. experience with Japan and Singapore illustrate this point.

The U.S.-Japan alliance is the cornerstone of American power in the Asia-Pacific, exhibiting both increased military interoperability and political alignment over time. The U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation Guidelines, updated in 2015, created an Alliance Coordination Mechanism expanding military coordination across all levels of conflict, provided for enhanced training, and increased functional domain awareness cooperation.³⁷⁵ The Japanese government has also accepted greater responsibility for regional security by increasing military spending and procuring an island to serve as a training site for U.S. forces.³⁷⁶ The Abe Shinzo and Suga Yoshihide governments maintain an outsized role in networking U.S. regional security partners Australia, India, and, unofficially, Taiwan.³⁷⁷ Of these, Japan-Australia ties are the most developed, with the two states announcing preliminary agreement on a defense arrangement permitting their forces to train in each other's countries and, separately, agreed in principle for the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force to protect Australian maritime assets; both steps are apparent signals of balancing against Beijing.³⁷⁸ Nonetheless, Tokyo suspended a planned deployment of the U.S. Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defense system, citing the program's costs

³⁷⁵ Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/guideline2.html>.

³⁷⁶ Tim Kelly, "Japan's military seek eighth straight annual hike in defense spending," *Reuters*, August 30, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-defence-budget/japans-military-seek-eighth-straight-annual-hike-in-defense-spending-idUSKCN1VK0D2>; *Kyodo News*, "Japan gov't agrees to buy island for U.S. military drills for 16 bil. yen," December 2, 2019, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2019/12/98d993420a94-govt-agrees-to-buy-island-for-us-military-drills-for-16-bil-yen.html>.

³⁷⁷ Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, 2007, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/australia/joint0703.html>; *Nikkei Asian Review*, "India and Japan to cement relations with new security deal," November 13, 2019, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/India-and-Japan-to-cement-relations-with-new-security-deal>; Howard Wang, "Japan Considers a New Security Relationship Via 'Networking' with Taiwan," *China Brief*, May 29, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/japan-considers-a-new-security-relationship-via-networking-with-taiwan/>.

³⁷⁸ Daniel Hurst and Justin McCurry, "Australia and Japan agree in principle to defence pact that will increase military ties," *The Guardian*, November 17, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/nov/17/australia-and-japan-agree-in-principle-to-defence-pact-that-will-increase-military-ties>; Reito Kaneko, "Japan and Australia to coordinate on protection of military assets," *Kyodo News*, October 19, 2020, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2020/10/51745f975882-update1-japan-australia-to-coordinate-on-protection-of-military-assets.html>; Daniel Hurst, "China warns Australia and Japan over 'confrontational' new defence pact," *The Guardian*, November 18, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/nov/18/china-warns-australia-and-japan-over-confrontational-new-defence-pact>.

despite its strategic importance to the U.S. military posture against the PRC, and Japanese officials have so far declined to host American land-based missiles which could threaten the Chinese mainland.³⁷⁹

The U.S.-Singapore strategic partnership reflects a close military partnership which drives only partial alignment between political agendas. Singapore is the foreign country with the largest military presence on U.S. soil, and the two countries continue to upgrade their security partnership with military facilities agreements and joint exercises.³⁸⁰ Even so, U.S.-Singapore strategic cooperation does not translate into total political alignment; Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong argued at the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue that “the rest of the world has to adjust to a larger role for China,” and the United States, as “the preeminent power, has the most difficult adjustment to make.”³⁸¹ Similarly, when in 2020 the U.S. Secretary of the Navy proposed basing a new Indo-Pacific fleet near where the Indian and Pacific Oceans meet, perhaps in Singapore, the Singaporean Ministry of Defense appeared cool to the idea, noting only that no adjustment is being made or requested from current policy.³⁸²

³⁷⁹ Mike Yeo, “Japan suspends Aegis Ashore deployment, pointing to cost and technical issues,” *DefenseNews*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2020/06/15/japan-suspends-aegis-ashore-deployment-pointing-to-cost-and-technical-issues/>; Jeffrey W. Hornung, “Japan Is Canceling a U.S. Missile Defense System,” *Foreign Policy*, July 2, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/02/japan-aegis-ashore-expense-cancel-united-states-alliance/>; Jesse Johnson, “The U.S. wants Japan's help to close its 'missile gap' with China. Is Tokyo up for it?,” *Japan Times*, August 25, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/08/25/national/politics-diplomacy/u-s-wants-japans-help-close-missile-gap-china-tokyo/>.

³⁸⁰ Prashanth Parameswaran, “What’s in the Renewed US-Singapore Military Facilities Agreement?” *The Diplomat* September 28, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/whats-in-the-renewed-us-singapore-military-facilities-agreement/>; Prashanth Parameswaran, “Why the New US-Singapore Guam Fighter Training Detachment Pact Matters,” *The Diplomat* December 9, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/why-the-new-us-singapore-guam-fighter-training-detachment-pact-matters/>; Prashanth Parameswaran, Twitter Post, December 9, 2019, <https://twitter.com/TheAsianist/status/1204073653777899524?s=20>.

³⁸¹ Lee Hsien Loong, “Remarks at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Shangri-La Dialogue Opening Dinner,” Singapore, May 31, 2019, <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/PM-Lee-Hsien-Loong-at-the-IISS-Shangri-La-Dialogue-2019>.

³⁸² Megan Eckstein, “SECNAV Braithwaite Calls for New U.S. 1st Fleet Near Indian, Pacific Oceans,” *USNI News*, November 17, 2020, <https://news.usni.org/2020/11/17/secnav-braithwaite-calls-for-new-u-s-1st-fleet-near-indian-pacific-oceans>; Singapore Ministry of Defense, “Reply to Queries on US SECNAV’s Calls for New US 1st Fleet Out of Singapore,” November 18, 2020, https://web.archive.org/web/20201119013410/https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/mindef/news-and-events/latest-releases/article-detail/2020/November/18nov20_mq.

The USG's third operational objective is to demonstrate political resolve lending credibility to its foreign policy.³⁸³ The USG makes credible its security guarantees, simultaneously tightening its alliances and deterring potential adversaries, with expressions of political resolve.³⁸⁴ Adversity is endogenous to resolve; a nation exhibits political resolve against competitors who attempt to demonstrate the converse and erode its political credibility, so presaging future failures in aggression deterrence.³⁸⁵ Various USG policies and documents since 2000 signaled a resolve to militarily dominate the PRC.³⁸⁶ During the George W. Bush administration, the Office of Net Assessment's (ONA) 2001 Defense Strategy Review (DSR) discussed coming military challenges that ONA Director Andrew Marshall described as shifting U.S. long-term focus toward Asia.³⁸⁷ The DSR findings informed the 2001 and 2006 Quadrennial Defense Reviews' areas for enhancing military capability; then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Thomas Mahnken described the latter document as being "really—albeit not exclusively—about China."³⁸⁸ The Bush administration began revising U.S. military force posture in Asia, which the Barack Obama administration continued as part of its Pivot to Asia/Asia-Pacific Rebalance. Among other efforts, the Rebalance involved deploying new high-end platforms such as "F-22, *Virginia*-class submarines, and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD)" to the theater.³⁸⁹ The Obama administration paired this change in U.S. Indo-Pacific force posture with direct appeals from then President Obama and then Secretary of

³⁸³ Robert J. McMahon, "Credibility and World Power: Exploring the Psychological Dimension in Postwar American Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 15, Iss. 4, (1991), 455-472, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1991.tb00142.x>.

³⁸⁴ U.S. White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 18, 2017, 28, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

³⁸⁵ Ketian Zhang, "Cautious Bully: Reputation, Resolve, and Beijing's Use of Coercion in the South China Sea" *International Security* 44, no. 1, (2019), 117-159, 123-124.

³⁸⁶ Nina Silove, "The Pivot before the Pivot: U.S. Strategy to Preserve the Power Balance in Asia" *International Security* 40, no. 4, (2016): 45-88.

³⁸⁷ Andrew Marshall, "Near Term Actions to Begin Shift of Focus towards Asia," *Office of the Secretary of Defense*, May 2, 2002, <http://library.rumsfeld.com/doclib/sp/2518/2002-05-02%20from%20Andy%20Marshall%20re%20Near%20Term%20Actions%20to%20Begin%20Shift%20of%20Focus%20Towards%20Asia.pdf>.

³⁸⁸ Nina Silove, "The Pivot before the Pivot: U.S. Strategy to Preserve the Power Balance in Asia" *International Security* 40, no. 4, (2016): 45-88, 58.

³⁸⁹ Michael Green et al., *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence, and Partnerships* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2016), 3, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/asia-pacific-rebalance-2025>.

State Hillary Clinton to Southeast Asian states, urging them to directly challenge PRC activities while suggesting these challenges would have U.S. support.³⁹⁰ The Donald Trump administration's military tool of choice to signal maritime resolve in the Indo-Pacific has been the Freedom of Navigation (FON) operation (FONOP), which asserts freedom of navigation regardless of other nations' excessive claims; DoD will continue these operations and encourage allies to participate in such.³⁹¹ The Trump administration escalated PRC-targeting FONOPS, conducting 7 in 2018, up from 4 in 2015 and 2016 each.³⁹²

USG resolve-demonstration policy produced mixed results, with particular weaknesses in the Obama administration's policy. After implying political support for challenges to PRC South China Sea claims in 2011, the USG withheld political support for the Philippines when it issued one such challenge at Scarborough Shoal in 2012, during which "the United States chose to accept the outcome of China's assertiveness."³⁹³ As U.S. credibility declined, Philippine Secretary of National Defense Delfin Lorenzana declared intentions to strengthen or abandon the Philippines' mutual defense treaty with the United States, which required an appeal from then Secretary of Defense Mark Esper to maintain.³⁹⁴ USG policy has also made successful assurances, including President Obama's declaration that the contested Senkaku

³⁹⁰ M. Taylor Fravel, "Threading the Needle: The South China Sea Disputes and U.S.-China Relations" in *Strategic Adjustment and the Rise of China: Power and Politics in East Asia*, eds. Robert S. Ross & Øystein Tunsjø, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 242.

³⁹¹ U.S. Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019, 43, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

³⁹² U.S. Department of Defense, "Report to Congress: Annual Freedom of Navigation Report Fiscal Year 2018," December 31, 2018, [https://policy.defense.gov/Portals/11/Documents/FY18%20DoD%20Annual%20FON%20Report%20\(final\).pdf?ver=2019-03-19-103517-010](https://policy.defense.gov/Portals/11/Documents/FY18%20DoD%20Annual%20FON%20Report%20(final).pdf?ver=2019-03-19-103517-010); Teddy Ng, "US steps up freedom of navigation patrols in South China Sea to counter Beijing's ambitions," *South China Morning Post*, February 16, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2186461/us-steps-freedom-navigation-patrols-south-china-sea-counter/>.

³⁹³ M. Taylor Fravel, "Threading the Needle: The South China Sea Disputes and U.S.-China Relations" in *Strategic Adjustment and the Rise of China: Power and Politics in East Asia*, eds. Robert S. Ross & Øystein Tunsjø, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 244.

³⁹⁴ Jelly Musico, "Lorenzana orders review of 67-year-old US-PH military pact," *Philippine News Agency*, December 28, 2018, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1057639>; Michael Punongbayan, "US stands by defense treaty with Philippines," *PhilStar* November 20, 2019, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/11/20/1970317/us-stands-defense-treaty-philippines>.

islands under Japanese administration are protected under the U.S.-Japan security treaty as well as receiving increased support from Australia, Canada, France, Japan, New Zealand, and the UK for FON in the South China Sea.³⁹⁵

Central to the varying results of U.S. policy toward the PRC prior to its recent turn toward USG-CCP competition was its principle of engagement, which sought to shape the CCP into a pliable partner for the United States by fielding a capable military capable of deterring by denial any potential of PLA mischief while simultaneously aligning the CCP's interests with U.S. interests by establishing Kissingerian linkages between CCP political decisions and its ability to benefit from global markets.³⁹⁶ This policy dramatically overestimated the USG's ability to shape CCP decision making; as senior Obama Administration officials Ely Ratner and Kurt Campbell came to recognize, CCP ambitions and insecurities vis-à-vis the United States exceeded USG analyst assessments, to the extent that the mere presence of U.S. military forces and alliances in Asia were "unacceptable" to the CCP.³⁹⁷ Not until the Trump and Biden Administrations did public USG national security documents recognize the CCP for the revisionist power that it is or adopt policies regarding the CCP as a competitor rather than a regime that can be managed to avoid competition altogether.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ Justin McCurry and Tania Branigan, "Obama says US will defend Japan in island dispute with China," *The Guardian*, April 24, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/24/obama-in-japan-backs-status-quo-in-island-dispute-with-china>; Ben Werner, "Future South China Sea FONOPS Will Include Allies, Partners," *USNI News*, February 12, 2019, <https://news.usni.org/2019/02/12/41070>.

³⁹⁶ Aaron L. Friedberg, "Competing with China," *Survival* 60:3, (2018), 10-11, <https://doi-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/10.1080/00396338.2018.1470755>; Tanner Greer, "Give No Heed to the Walking Dead," *The Scholar's Stage*, July 1, 2019, <https://scholars-stage.blogspot.com/2019/07/give-no-heed-to-walking-dead.html>; U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Relations, 1969-1976, Volume I, Foundations of Foreign Policy," <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/i/21100.htm>.

³⁹⁷ Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, "The China Reckoning," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-02-13/china-reckoning>.

³⁹⁸ U.S. White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 18, 2017, 25, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

Enduring USG Maritime Interest: Freedom of the Seas

U.S. expressions of political resolve in maritime affairs demonstrate the American predisposition toward upholding the freedom of the seas, which in current iteration is predicated on U.S. military access wherever permitted by international law. American maritime policy in the Asia-Pacific demonstrates consistent values and operations but muddled objectives since the late 1970s. U.S. maritime policy, including FONOPs, across administrations emphasized freedom of the seas as an American value not to be constrained by a great power competitor or by international law. Although the U.S. FON Program self-describes as “based on principle,” the logic and expression of U.S. FONOPs prioritize U.S. military access in competition with foreign powers while demonstrating measured indifference to international law.³⁹⁹ This section offers the strategic logic behind the U.S. FON Program during the Cold War and contiguous elements with current operations targeting excessive PRC maritime claims.

The history of U.S. maritime policy shows an American predisposition toward the freedom of the seas, loosely defined by confidence that law-abiding citizens can cross international waters free from the fear of molestation by foreign vessels, especially precluding seizure of private property.⁴⁰⁰ The ideal underpinned the U.S.-Prussia Treaty of 1785, the second of President Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Points in 1918, the controversial League of Nations meeting at the Hague in 1930, and U.S. negotiations on the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea in 1958.⁴⁰¹ Following the Cold War, the U.S. military’s singular ability to leverage

³⁹⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, “Freedom of Navigation Program Fact Sheet,” February 28, 2017 <https://policy.defense.gov/Portals/11/DoD%20FON%20Program%20Summary%202016.pdf?ver=2017-03-03-141350-380>; U.S. Department of Defense, “Annual Freedom of Navigation Report Fiscal Year 2018,” February 28, 2019 [https://policy.defense.gov/Portals/11/Documents/FY18%20DoD%20Annual%20FON%20Report%20\(final\).pdf?ver=2019-03-19-103517-010](https://policy.defense.gov/Portals/11/Documents/FY18%20DoD%20Annual%20FON%20Report%20(final).pdf?ver=2019-03-19-103517-010).

⁴⁰⁰ Arthur Garfield Hays, “What is Meant by the Freedom of the Seas,” *The American Journal of International Law* 12, no. 2, (April 1918) 283-290; Christopher R. Rossi, *Sovereignty and Territorial Temptation: The Grotian Tendency*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 32-33, 49.

⁴⁰¹ J.S. Reeves, “Two Conceptions of the Freedom of the Seas,” *The American Historical Review* 22, no. 3 (April 1917), 535-543, 540; “President Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Points (1918),” [ourdocuments.gov](https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=62) <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=62>; Viscount Grey of Fallodon, “Freedom of the Seas,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 1, 1930, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/oceans-seas/1930-04-01/freedom-seas>; Arthur H. Dean, “Freedom of the Seas,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 1, 1958,

command of the commons for global power projection further cemented the principle's importance in American strategic culture.⁴⁰²

While FONOPs are not the sum of U.S. policy reflecting freedom of the seas, they are the product of a policymaking approach which self-interestedly pursued that freedom while disregarding international agreements. U.S. interest in FONOPs arose with the United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), an international agreement enumerating the limits of maritime claims and permissible types of activities in them. In 1979, as a third round of UNCLOS negotiations were underway, President Jimmy Carter directed his National Security Council (NSC) to identify options to ensure FON for the United States even if it does not become an UNCLOS signatory. Carter's NSC recommended a formal FON Program by which the United States "protest claims of other States that are inconsistent with international law and U.S. policy, with particular reference to extended territorial sea claims as well as the regime therein."⁴⁰³

Carter's NSC recommended a FON Program that served as the basis for President Ronald Reagan's 1983 Oceans Policy, which had two key points: 1) the U.S. will recognize the rights of other states pursuant to UNCLOS if that state reciprocates for the U.S. and other states, and 2) the U.S. "will exercise and assert its navigation and overflight rights and freedoms on a worldwide basis in a manner that is consistent with the balance of interests reflected in the convention" but will not "acquiesce in unilateral acts of other states designed to restrict the rights and freedoms of the international community in navigation and overflight and other related high seas uses."⁴⁰⁴ Reagan's publicly announced policy implied the USG's political calculus reflected

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/commons/1958-10-01/freedom-seas>.

⁴⁰² James Kraska and Raul Pedrozo, *The Free Sea: The American Fight for Freedom of Navigation* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 2; Barry R. Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security* 28, no. 1, (2003), 5-46,

<https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/016228803322427965?journalCode=isec&>.

⁴⁰³ U.S. National Security Council Memorandum, "Navigation and Overflight Policy," February 1, 1979, confidential, declassified October 31, 2013, quoted in James Kraska and Raul Pedrozo, *The Free Sea: The American Fight for Freedom of Navigation* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 360.

⁴⁰⁴ Ronald Reagan, "Statement on United States Oceans Policy," March 10, 1983,

an international “balance of interests,” and this message continues to be how the modern U.S. FON Program describes itself.⁴⁰⁵

Reagan’s messaging was a veneer over self-interested U.S. policy set the year prior. In December 1982, the Reagan White House issued National Security Decision Directive 72, wherein the USG would follow a set schedule of FONOPs to “protect U.S. navigation, overflight, and related security interests in the seas through the vigorous exercise of its rights against excessive maritime claims,” to ensure the U.S. enjoys UNCLOS’ benefits without being subject to its restrictions.⁴⁰⁶ Moreover, Reagan-era FONOPs were primarily assertive tools by which the U.S. shaped its strategic environment with threats of escalation, not tools to champion international freedom of navigation. FONOPs deployed in the Cold War included presence operations threatening provocative Soviet activities. The Soviet Union was geographically disadvantaged for maritime competition and depended heavily on passage through the Black Sea to deploy one of its three major fleet concentrations.⁴⁰⁷ Accordingly, the Reagan administration deployed warships on innocent passage FONOPs through the Black Sea on a regular basis, culminating in Soviet naval vessels ramming two U.S. warships in 1988, to which the Reagan administration responded by launching FONOPs directly following major Soviet naval exercises and sending a nuclear-powered cruiser to transit the Black Sea.⁴⁰⁸ International sea lines of communication were not at risk in these scenarios; Reagan’s FONOPs threatened

<https://www.jag.navy.mil/organization/documents/Reagan%20Ocean%20Policy%20Statement.pdf>.

⁴⁰⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, “Freedom of Navigation Program Fact Sheet,” February 28, 2017, <https://policy.defense.gov/Portals/11/DoD%20FON%20Program%20Summary%2016.pdf?ver=2017-03-03-141350-380>; U.S. Department of Defense, “Freedom of Navigation Program Fact Sheet,” March 2015, [https://policy.defense.gov/Portals/11/Documents/gsa/cwmd/DoD%20FON%20Program%20-%20Fact%20Sheet%20\(March%202015\).pdf](https://policy.defense.gov/Portals/11/Documents/gsa/cwmd/DoD%20FON%20Program%20-%20Fact%20Sheet%20(March%202015).pdf).

⁴⁰⁶ U.S. National Security Decision Directive 72, “United States Program for the Exercise of Navigation and Overflight Rights at Sea,” December 13, 1982, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-72.pdf>.

⁴⁰⁷ James Kraska and Raul Pedrozo, *The Free Sea: The American Fight for Freedom of Navigation* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 230.

⁴⁰⁸ John Lehman, *Oceans Ventured: Winning the Cold War at Sea* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 223-225.

to bottle the Soviet navy at geographic chokepoints in the Black Sea and so fulfilled their primary purpose.

President George H. W. Bush modified Reagan's FON policy by discontinuing the preset FONOP schedule and additionally specifying that the program's purpose is to "preserve the global mobility of U.S. forces by avoiding acquiescence in excessive maritime claims of other nations," and President Bill Clinton's administration left Bush's policy unchanged.⁴⁰⁹

After the Cold War, the U.S. FON Program was little publicized until President Barack Obama restarted FONOP patrols in the South China Sea. In 2015, the Obama administration ordered the USS *Lassen* to conduct a FONOP sailing within twelve nautical miles of Subi Reef, a feature of disputed sovereignty administered by the PRC; while the United States does not recognize Subi Reef as an island conferring a twelve nautical mile territorial zone as is the right of islands under UNCLOS, PRC statements at that time implied a sovereign claim to Subi Reef, among other South China Sea features, as well as twelve nautical miles of territorial sea around those features.⁴¹⁰

Though much of the public discourse surrounded interpreting UNCLOS and the legitimacy of the PRC claims,⁴¹¹ the 2015 FONOP's timing suggests it was a retaliation to a growing military threat rather than sovereignty *per se*. In 2014 and 2015, the PRC escalated its South China Sea island-building campaign, by which it poured sand atop features not normally above sea level, dredged harbors, and constructed radars, airstrips long enough for military

⁴⁰⁹ U.S. National Security Directive 49, "Freedom of Navigation Program," October 12, 1990, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsd/nsd49.pdf>; U.S. Presidential Decision Directive/NSC-32, "Freedom of Navigation," January 23, 1995, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd/pdd-32.pdf>.

⁴¹⁰ Michael Green, Bonnie Glaser, and Gregory Poling, "The U.S. Asserts Freedom of Navigation in the South China Sea," *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, October 27, 2015, <https://amti.csis.org/the-u-s-asserts-freedom-of-navigation-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

⁴¹¹ See, for example, Sydney J. Freedberg, Jr., "US Hasn't Challenged Chinese 'Islands' Since 2012," *Breaking Defense*, September 17, 2015, <https://breakingdefense.com/2015/09/us-has-steered-clear-of-chinese-artificial-islands-in-south-china-sea/>; and Adam Klein and Mira Rapp-Hooper, "Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South China Sea: What to Watch For," *Lawfare*, October 13, 2015, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/freedom-navigation-operations-south-china-sea-what-watch>.

bomber takeoff and landing, and piers long enough for warships to dock.⁴¹² These islands offer the PLA a forward-leaning posture that threatens U.S. military overmatch in the region and risks the U.S. military's ability to guarantee seaborne transit in the region.⁴¹³

Correspondingly, the *Lassen's* transit in October 2015 was the first in a semi-regular FONOP schedule targeting Chinese claims in the South China Sea and East China Sea through 2016.⁴¹⁴ President Donald Trump's administration increased the South China Sea FONOP tempo; the USG conducted two South China Sea FONOPs in 2015, three in 2016, six in 2017, five in 2018, and nine in 2019.⁴¹⁵

The Trump administration followed the Reagan administration's pattern of executing a self-interested FON Program for great power competition akin to Reagan's National Security Decision Directive 72 while publicly describing the FON Program as the most visible part of a comprehensive policy defending "freedom of navigation and overflight in the Indo-Pacific" region broadly.⁴¹⁶ DoD describes its FONOPs as protecting the region's "stable economic order," and the State Department asserts its FON Program operates with Indo-Pacific partners "so that all nations can access and benefit from the maritime commons."⁴¹⁷ This description suggests the Trump administration attempted, as Reagan's administration did, to prosecute a great power

⁴¹² Derek Watkins, "What China Has Been Building in the South China Sea," *New York Times*, October 27, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/07/30/world/asia/what-china-has-been-building-in-the-south-china-sea.html>; Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "Airpower in the South China Sea," July 29, 2015, <https://amti.csis.org/airstrips-scs>.

⁴¹³ Austin Wright, Bryan Bender, and Philip Ewing, "Obama team, military at odds over South China Sea," *POLITICO*, July 31, 2015, <https://www.politico.com/story/2015/07/barack-obama-administration-navy-pentagon-odds-south-china-sea-120865>.

⁴¹⁴ Cid Standifer, "UPDATED: A Brief History of U.S. Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South China Sea," *USNI News*, July 2, 2017, <https://news.usni.org/2017/05/29/brief-history-us-freedom-navigation-operations-south-china-sea>.

⁴¹⁵ David B. Larer, "In challenging China's claims in the South China Sea, the US Navy is getting more assertive," *DefenseNews*, February 5, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2020/02/05/in-challenging-chinas-claims-in-the-south-china-sea-the-us-navy-is-getting-more-assertive/>.

⁴¹⁶ Jim Garamone, "U.S., Allies Aim to Maintain Free, Open Indo-Pacific Region," *DOD News*, August 8, 2018 <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/1596903/us-allies-aim-to-maintain-free-open-indo-pacific-region/>.

⁴¹⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019, 43, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>; U.S. Department of State, "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision" November 4, 2019, 23 <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>.

competition strategy under the veneer of defending public goods for allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific.

Despite public narratives of U.S. values aligning with international law, U.S. maritime interests have consistently prioritized military access. The DoD FON Program exemplifies U.S. priorities with presence operations which reject potential adversaries' activities or force postures that may restrict U.S. military access.

VI. Trends and Asymmetries

This section discusses key trends in the CCP's maritime transformation and relevant operational asymmetries with the USG. Trends discussed span the multifunctional nature of sea power as an instrument of strategic competition. Discussed trends include trajectories in CCP or USG national security policymaking, such as their respective visions for naval force structure, and CCP responses to the enduring realities to which the competitors are forced to respond, such as Indo-Pacific geography. Appended to the discussion of each trend and its role in CCP maritime transformation are the operational asymmetries in each sides' national security establishment that might give the trend outsized impact to one competitor.

China's Economic Future

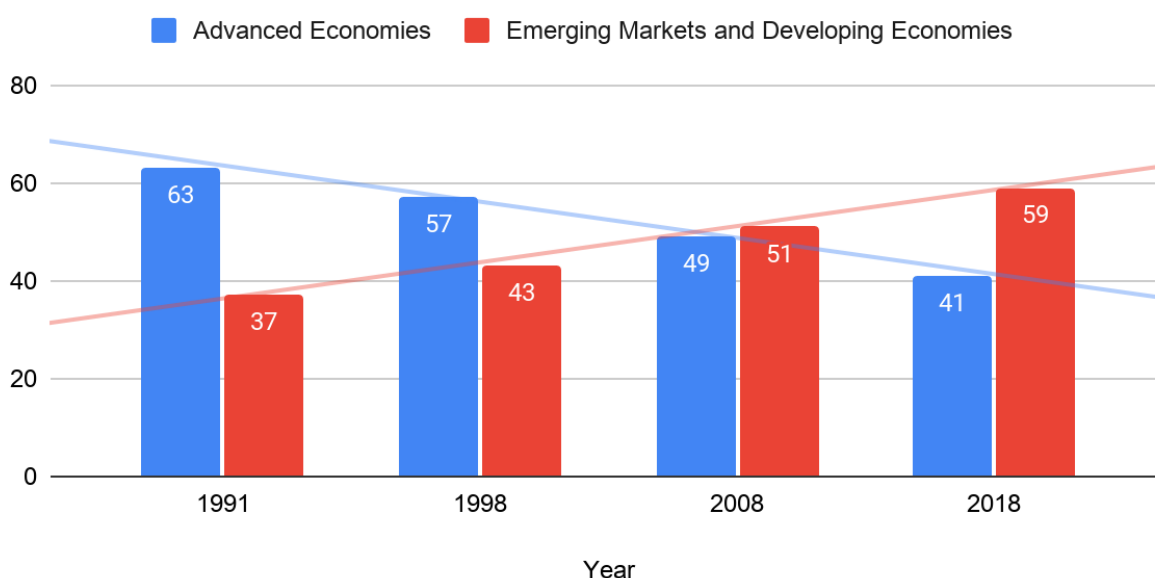
PRC economic growth and how it is perceived constitute the competitive baseline from which other enduring trends of the USG-CCP strategic competition are derived. As detailed in Section IV, CCP white papers assert a narrative that the world has entered a "new era" of development defined by the economic rise of developing countries, led by explosive Chinese economic growth, and receding U.S. influence.⁴¹⁸ Xi Jinping explicitly tied PRC economic development to global leadership at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in 2017, saying

⁴¹⁸ PRC State Council Information Office, *China and the World in the New Era*, September 27, 2019, 3 & 30, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html.

“China’s development is an opportunity for the world,” and the PRC “will open our arms to the people of other countries and welcome them aboard the express train of China’s development.”⁴¹⁹

The demonstrated success of PRC economic growth has two functions in USG-CCP strategic competition. First, the international perception of continued PRC growth underpins the CCP’s Marxist justification for driving change in the global superstructure: the CCP’s exhibition of a superior economic model is necessary to increase its stature and claim to global leadership. The narrative of a rising PRC and a declining West is the CCP’s fundamental argument in USG-CCP strategic competition. Second, sustained economic growth funds CCP maritime transformation through sustained commercial investments and long-term PLAN modernization.⁴²⁰

Figure 4: The CCP’s Argument: Percentage Share of the World Economy Between Advanced Economies and Emerging Markets



Source: PRC State Council Information Office, *China and the World in the New Era*, September 27, 2019, 30, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201909/27/content_WS5d8d80f9c6d0bcf8c4c142ef.html.

⁴¹⁹ Xi Jinping, “Jointly Shoulder Responsibility of Our Times, Promote Global Growth,” (speech, Opening Session Of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2017, Davos, January 17, 2017), <https://america.cgtn.com/2017/01/17/full-text-of-xi-jinping-keynote-at-the-world-economic-forum>.

⁴²⁰ China Power Project, “What Does China Really Spend on its Military?” Accessed December 7, 2020, <https://chinapower.csis.org/military-spending/>.

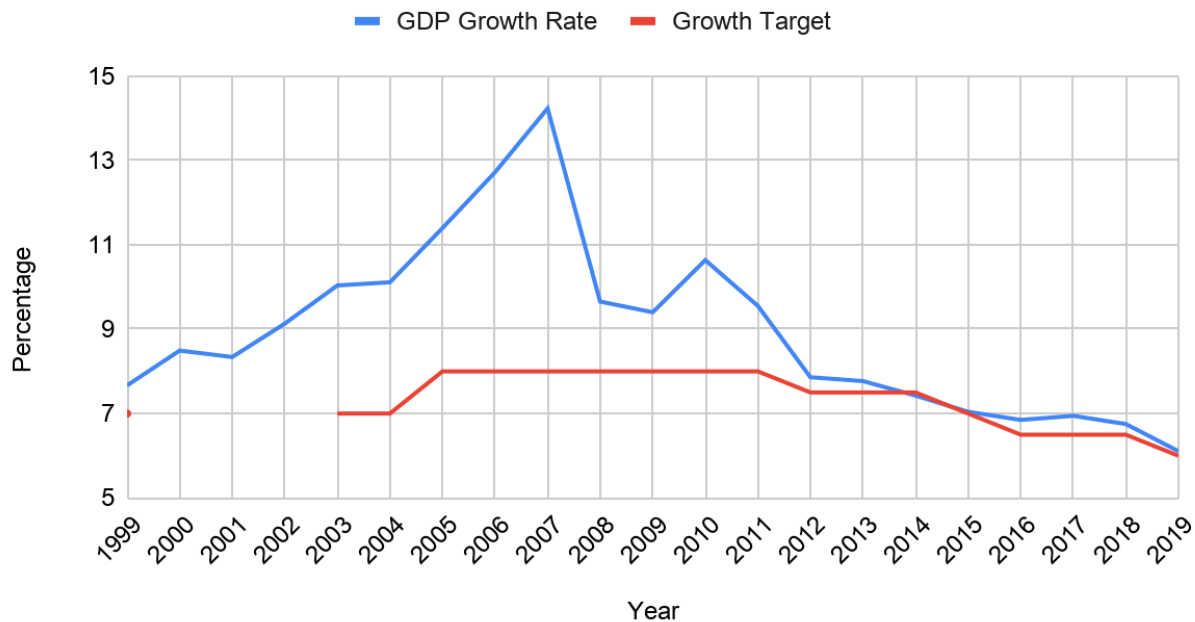
However, declining returns on fixed asset investment and Beijing's persistent inclination to rely on investment as a stimulus of economic growth suggests that the once-explosive rate of Chinese economic growth will not be enduring. To the extent that this growth represents a systemic change in the global order, the most significant effects of such have likely already occurred. This subsection considers the PRC's future economic growth before turning to identify key budgetary asymmetries between the PRC and USG pertinent to the future of the maritime balance.

Trend: Diminishing Returns on Chinese Fixed-Asset Investment

The PRC sustained remarkable annual GDP growth for decades, peaking at 14.23 percent in 2007 followed by steady growth rate declines.⁴²¹ Much of this growth was driven by an investment-led growth model largely dependent on fixed-asset investments. Declining GDP growth rates over the past decade indicate structural changes in the PRC economy which require a new growth model to arrest the decline. Official PRC publications indicate CCP leaders are aware of the need for a new growth model; still, Chinese leaders continue to pursue investment-led growth to arrest economic downturn.

⁴²¹ *The World Bank*, "World Development Indicators," accessed December 7, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2019&locations=CN&start=1999>.

Figure 5: Annual PRC GDP Growth Rate and Growth Target, 1999-2019



Sources: various.⁴²²

⁴²² The World Bank, "GDP growth (annual %) - China," accessed December 7, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2019&locations=CN&start=1999>; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Annual Report to Congress, November 2019, 51, <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2019-11/2019%20Annual%20Report%20to%20Congress.pdf>; Wen Jiabao, "Report on the Work of the Government," (speech, First Session of the Eleventh National People's Congress, March 5, 2008), http://english.qstheory.cn/resources/work_reports/201109/t20110920_111447.htm; Wen Jiabao, "Report on the Work of the Government," (speech, Fifth Session of the Tenth National People's Congress, March 5, 2007), http://english.qstheory.cn/resources/work_reports/201109/t20110920_111443.htm; Wen Jiabao, "Report on the Work of the Government," (speech, Fourth Session of the Tenth National People's Congress, March 5, 2006), http://english1.english.gov.cn/2006-03/14/content_227247.htm; Wen Jiabao, "Report on the Work of the Government," (speech, Third Session of the Tenth National People's Congress, March 5, 2005), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-03/15/content_425079.htm; Wen Jiabao, "Report on the Work of the Government," (speech, Second Session of the Tenth National People's Congress, March 5, 2004), http://en.people.cn/200403/16/eng20040316_137651.shtml; Zhu Rongji, "Report on the Work of the Government," (speech, First Session of the Tenth National People's Congress, March 5, 2003), http://english.qstheory.cn/resources/work_reports/201109/t20110920_111397.htm; Hu Angang, "The Chinese Economy in Prospect," in *China, the United States, and the Global Economy*, eds. Chen Shuxun and Charles Wolf, Jr., (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2001), 125, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/2006/MR1300.pdf. The PRC did not set GDP growth targets from 2000 through 2002. See *China Daily*, "China did not set GDP growth target thrice previously: NDRC official," May 25, 2020, http://www.china.org.cn/business/2020-05/25/content_76086732.htm.

Long-term economic growth potential is determined in the short term by demand side factors⁴²³ and long term by supply side factors.⁴²⁴ PRC economic growth policy emphasizes demand. Beginning in the mid-2000s, the contribution of fixed asset investment to PRC GDP growth spiked after the global financial crisis of 2007-2009.⁴²⁵ This reflected broader trends: PRC economic growth since 1990 has been increasingly dependent on high levels of fixed asset investments in terms of volume as well as investment consistency.⁴²⁶ Just as importantly, CCP leaders have been inclined toward increasing state-funded fixed asset investments to increase PRC economic growth, particularly in times of crisis.

For decades, the PRC successfully grew its fixed asset investment stream; the PRC maintained an average annual growth rate of 20.2 percent in fixed asset investment from 1981 to 2017.⁴²⁷ PRC gross capital formation, which includes fixed-asset and inventory investment but during this period was overwhelmingly driven by the former, consistently grew as a share of its GDP from the inception of the People's Republic.⁴²⁸ This trend continued in the PRC's recent

⁴²³ Supply side factors of growth include labor, capital, land, national resources, intermediate inputs, and total factor production, while demand side factors are largely comprised of the outlook for a state's export, fixed asset investment, and household consumption sectors. See Justin Yifu Lin, Guanghua Wan, and Peter J. Morgan, "Factors Affecting the Outlook for Medium- to Long-term Growth in the People's Republic of China," in *Slowdown in the People's Republic of China: Structural Factors and the Implications for Asia*, ed. Justin Yifu Lin, Peter J. Morgan, and Guanghua Wan, (Tokyo: Asian Development Bank Institute, 2018), 232 & 238, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/407726/adb-slowdown-prc-structural-factors-and-implications-asia.pdf>.

⁴²⁴ Robert M. Solow, "A Contribution to the Theory of Economic Growth," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 70, no. 1, (1956), 65-94, <https://academic.oup.com/qje/article-abstract/70/1/65/1903777>.

⁴²⁵ Justin Yifu Lin, Guanghua Wan, and Peter J. Morgan, "Factors Affecting the Outlook for Medium- to Long-term Growth in the People's Republic of China," in *Slowdown in the People's Republic of China: Structural Factors and the Implications for Asia*, ed. Justin Yifu Lin, Peter J. Morgan, and Guanghua Wan, (Tokyo: Asian Development Bank Institute, 2018), 238 & 242, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/407726/adb-slowdown-prc-structural-factors-and-implications-asia.pdf>.

⁴²⁶ Since the early 2000s, fixed-asset investment and household consumption have had approximate importance as drivers of China's economic growth, and as such, continuously growing investment is critical for stable annual economic growth. See Louis Kuijs, "Investment and Saving in China," *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* 3633, June 2005, 4, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/644241468213285959/pdf/wps3633.pdf>.

⁴²⁷ *Xinhua*, "China's fixed-asset investment grows fast since 1978," September 9, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-09/06/c_137450257.htm.

⁴²⁸ Carsten A. Holz, "Is excessive domestic investment hurting China?" *Mercator Institute for China Studies*, November 18, 2015, 4, https://merics.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/China_Monitor_No_29_Is%20excessive%20domestic%20investment%20hurting%20China.pdf; Louis Kuijs, "Investment and Saving in China," *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* 3633, June 2005, 4-5, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/644241468213285959/pdf/wps3633.pdf>.

economic history, with gross capital formation comprising 34.11 percent of PRC GDP in 1999 and growing to 43.79 percent in 2018.⁴²⁹

The PRC's rapid economic growth through the mid-2000s is due in large part to this fixed asset capital investment, which grew to, then maintained a high rate because of a consistently high rate of return, a ready labor supply, and entrepreneurial expectations of rapid economic growth.⁴³⁰ Rapidly growing investments required financing, and the PRC's capital investment, financed by significant domestic savings and foreign investment, drove a virtuous cycle defined by rapid productivity growth.⁴³¹ A landmark study published by the World Bank Group and the PRC State Council's Development Research Center (DRC) argues that PRC total factor productivity measured about 3.51 percent from 1998-2008, and that these levels helped explain the PRC's elevated economic growth rates.⁴³²

Returns on PRC fixed asset investment have predictably⁴³³ declined as the productivity of its capital continues to diminish, as shown in Figure 6.⁴³⁴ The decline in PRC GDP growth rates directly corresponds to increases in the PRC investment capital output ratio (ICOR), in

⁴²⁹ The World Bank, "Gross capital formation (% of GDP) - China," accessed December 7, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.GDI.TOTL.ZS?end=2018&locations=CN&start=1999>.

⁴³⁰ John Knight and Sai Ding, "Why does China Invest So Much?" *University of Oxford Department of Economics Discussion Paper Series*, July 2009, https://www.economics.ox.ac.uk/materials/working_papers/paper441.pdf.

⁴³¹ Wayne M. Morrison, *China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implications for the United States* RL33534, Congressional Research Service, June 25, 2019, 6-7, https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20190625_RL33534_088c5467dd11365dd4ab5f72133db289fa10030f.pdf.

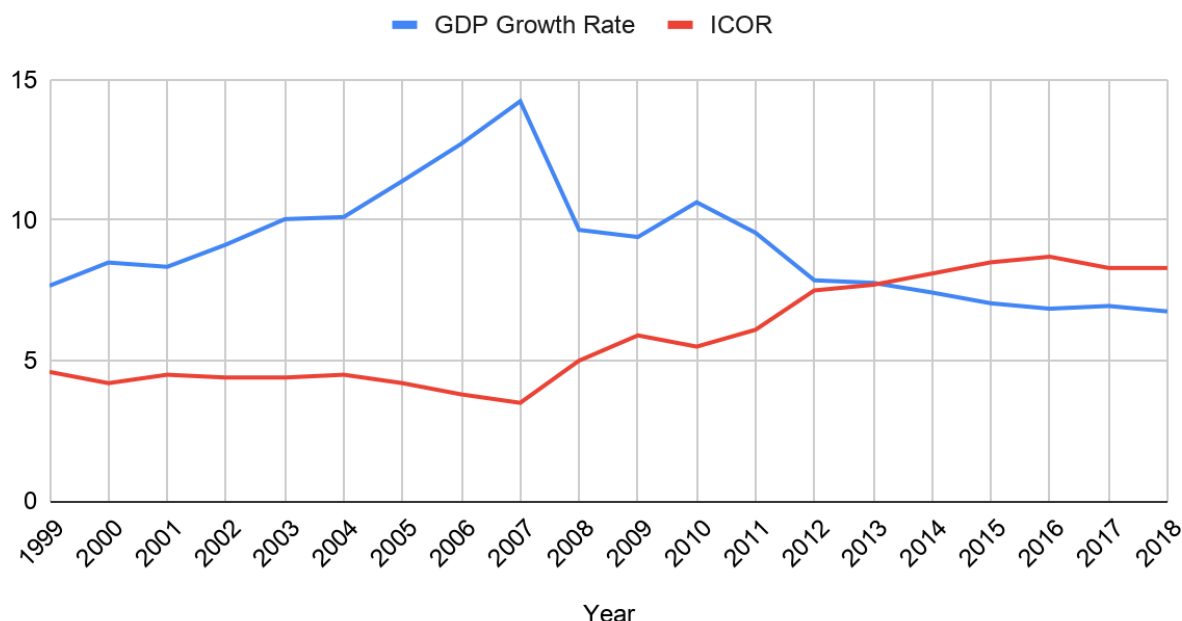
⁴³² World Bank Group and PRC State Council Development Research Center, "Innovative China: New Drivers of Growth," 2019, 19, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/833871568732137448/pdf/Innovative-China-New-Drivers-of-Growth.pdf>. Indicators for ongoing investment volume are mixed: while Chinese fixed asset investment grew 5.2 percent in the first 11 months of 2019, economic contractions associated with COVID-19 facilitated a 16.1 percent drop in fixed asset investment in the first quarter of 2020. Whether and how Chinese investment will recover remains to be seen. See *Xinhua*, "China's fixed-asset investment up 5.2 pct," December 16, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/16/c_138634507.htm; *Xinhua*, "China's fixed-asset investment down 16.1 pct in Q1," April 17, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/17/c_138984298.htm.

⁴³³ The PRC economic growth model as described herein closely matches the Harrod-Domar growth model, whereby growth rate is effectively a function of the productivity of capital and the rate of investment, and the rate of investment is a product of the domestic savings rate. Under this model, the productivity of capital will be particularly high in earlier stages of development as investment fills longstanding needs, but that productivity will diminish as those needs are filled.

⁴³⁴ Martin Raiser, "China's rise fits every development model," *Brookings*, October 17, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2019/10/17/chinas-rise-fits-every-development-model/>.

which a higher ICOR indicates less production efficiency and, as such, less economic growth for capital invested.

Figure 6: Economic Growth and Declining Returns on Capital Investment in the PRC, 1999-2018

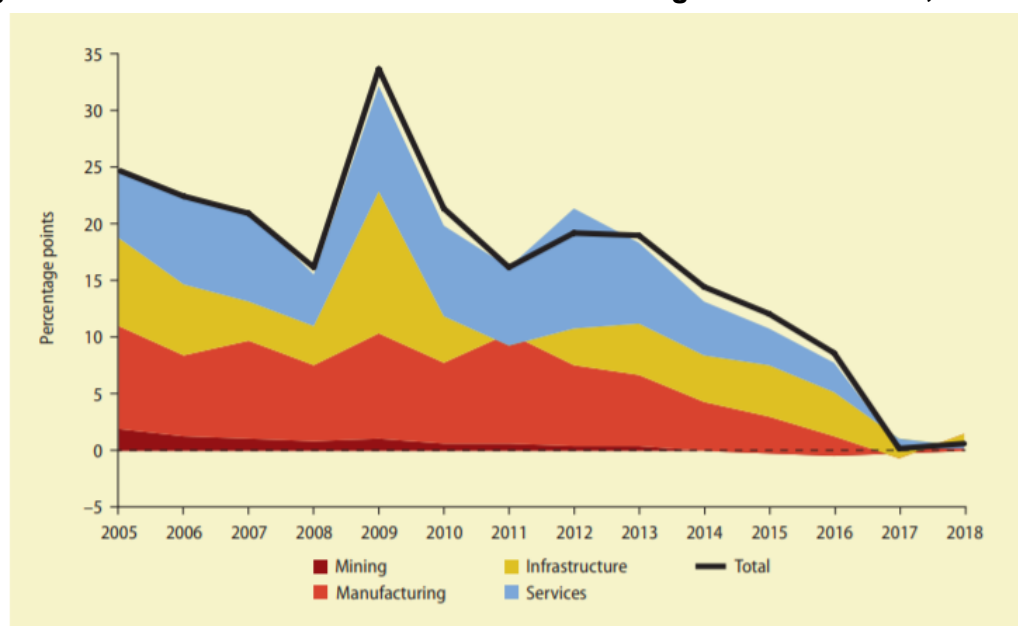


Sources: The World Bank, “World Development Indicators,” accessed December 7, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2019&locations=CN&start=1999>; David Orsmond, “China’s Economic Choices,” *Lowy Institute*, December 17, 2019, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/china-s-economic-choices>.

Parallel to diminishing Chinese productivity and GDP growth is the starker World Bank and DRC assessment of a full collapse in fixed asset investment’s contribution to PRC economic growth across the mining, manufacturing, infrastructure, and service sectors. Even as the PRC’s share of global manufacturing increases by large margins, investment in China’s manufacturing sector has minimal returns.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁵ World Bank Group and PRC State Council Development Research Center, “Innovative China: New Drivers of Growth,” 2019, 5, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/833871568732137448/pdf/Innovative-China-New-Drivers-of-Growth.pdf>.

Figure 7: Contribution of fixed asset investment to growth in the PRC, 2005-2018



Source: Calculations based on National Bureau of Statistics data.

Source: World Bank Group and PRC State Council Development Research Center, "Innovative China: New Drivers of Growth," 2019, 5, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/833871568732137448/pdf/Innovative-China-New-Drivers-of-Growth.pdf>.

Analysts recognize several factors to be slowing PRC GDP growth, including government interference with resource allocation, an excessively high debt leverage ratio following the 2008 financial crisis, the collapse of demand growth for China's exports, and the continuously rising savings and investment rate. Continuously high investment likely led to overinvestment in and thus overcapacity in some sectors.⁴³⁶ This explanation is reinforced by the proclivity of PRC provincial government officials, who are politically incentivized to use fixed asset investments as a constant stimulus, leading to a pattern of overinvestment in unnecessary or otherwise unproductive infrastructure projects in order to meet growth targets set by the central government.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁶ Wang Xiaolu and Zhou Yixiao, "Forecasting China's Economic Growth by 2020 and 2030" in *China's New Sources of Economic Growth Vol. 1*, eds. Song Ligang et al., (Acton: Australian National University Press, 2016), 65, <https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/n1906/pdf/book.pdf>.

⁴³⁷ Lucy Hornby, "China locked into investment-led growth by GDP targets," *Financial Times*, July 22, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/8813fb90-a9ed-11e9-984c-fac8325aaa04>.

Diminishing returns on fixed asset investment is a critical enduring trend for PRC economic projections not only because it is a significant driver of the PRC's domestic economic slowdown in its own right but also because it is the CCP's favored tool to prop up the image of economic growth. The CCP's recent policy response to the slowing economic growth typical of the transition to an advanced economy has focused on encouraging local governments to increase their debt burdens in order to post artificially inflated growth numbers.⁴³⁸ Beijing again turned to capital investment as the solution in 2020 when facing the economic crises brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Beijing attempted to manage the economic decline with sizable state-led investment that benefitted SOEs and increased local government financial dependence on the central government yet did little to support smaller and privately owned companies; the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission assesses that this policy response does little to spur consumption, further compounding Chinese overcapacity and undermining the PRC's economic recovery.⁴³⁹ The PRC has not demonstrated an ability to effectively move beyond investment-led growth in or out of crisis; instead, Beijing's policy responses have suggested CCP leaders' proclivity toward if not dependence on such.

Asymmetry: Defense Budget Trajectories

PRC defense spending is distinct in two ways from USG defense spending: PRC defense spending is 1) steady as a percentage of GDP and 2) growing as a proportion of the bilateral defense spending balance. Just as the CCP situates its claim to leadership of a "new era" on continuing PRC economic growth at elevated levels, future capital-intensive investments in the PLA, including a modernizing naval force structure, will depend on continued PRC economic growth.

⁴³⁸ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Annual Report to Congress, November 2019, 51, <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2019-11/2019%20Annual%20Report%20to%20Congress.pdf>.

⁴³⁹ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Annual Report to Congress, December 2020, 203 & 211, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/2020_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf.

The CCP demonstrates an enduring commitment to maintaining total military expenditures at around 2 percent of GDP, neither increasing during upswings nor decreasing in economic downturns.⁴⁴⁰ When facing a sharp economic contraction in the wake of COVID-19, the PRC National People's Congress increased the PLA's official budget by 6.6 percent while at the same time cutting all nonurgent government spending by 50 percent.⁴⁴¹ By comparison, the overall U.S. defense budget, which well exceeds that of the PLA in dollars and in percentage of GDP, has varied with transient political shifts. From 2010 on, the U.S. defense budget faced pressures from enduring budget deficits, the residual impact of the Global Financial Crisis, and the Budget Control Act of 2011, which collectively drove a federal disinvestment in defense of nearly one-fourth by 2015.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ *The World Bank*, "World Development Indicators," accessed December 12, 2020,

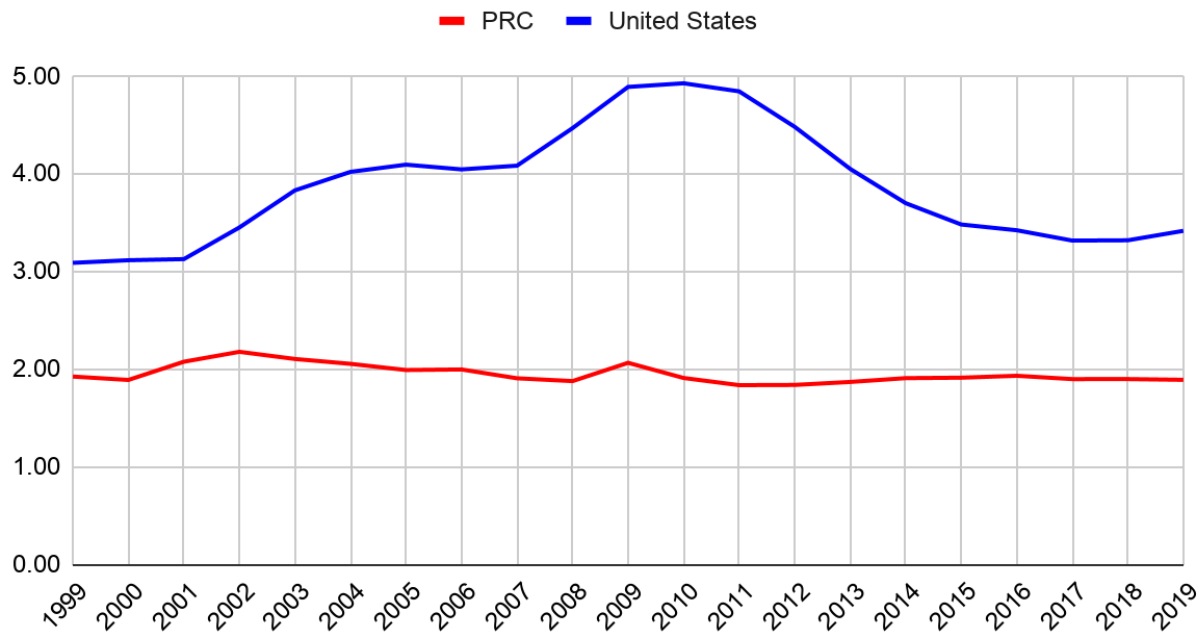
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?end=2019&locations=US-CN&start=1999&view=chart>.

⁴⁴¹ *Xinhua*, "Government Work Report: This Year, Non-critical and Non-rigid Expenditures at the Central Level Will Be Cut by More than 50 Percent" (政府工作报告: 今年中央本级非急需非刚性支出压减 50% 以上), May 22, 2020,

http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020lh/2020-05/22/c_1126018040.htm; Bonnie S. Glaser, Matthew P. Funaiolo, and Brian Hart, "Breaking Down China's 2020 Defense Budget," Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 22, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/breaking-down-chinas-2020-defense-budget>. Note that China's official figures on its military spending consistently and systematically falls short of estimates from independent analysts. See U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Annual Report to Congress, December 2020, 341-342, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/2020_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf; China Power Project, "What Does China Really Spend on Its Military?" Center for Strategic and International Studies, <https://chinapower.csis.org/military-spending/>; Shaoguang Wang, "The Military Expenditure of China, 1989-98," in *SIPRI Yearbook 1999: Armaments, Disarmaments and International Security*, 334-349, <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/SIPRI%20Yearbook%201999.pdf>.

⁴⁴² Hal Brands, *American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018), 133-134.

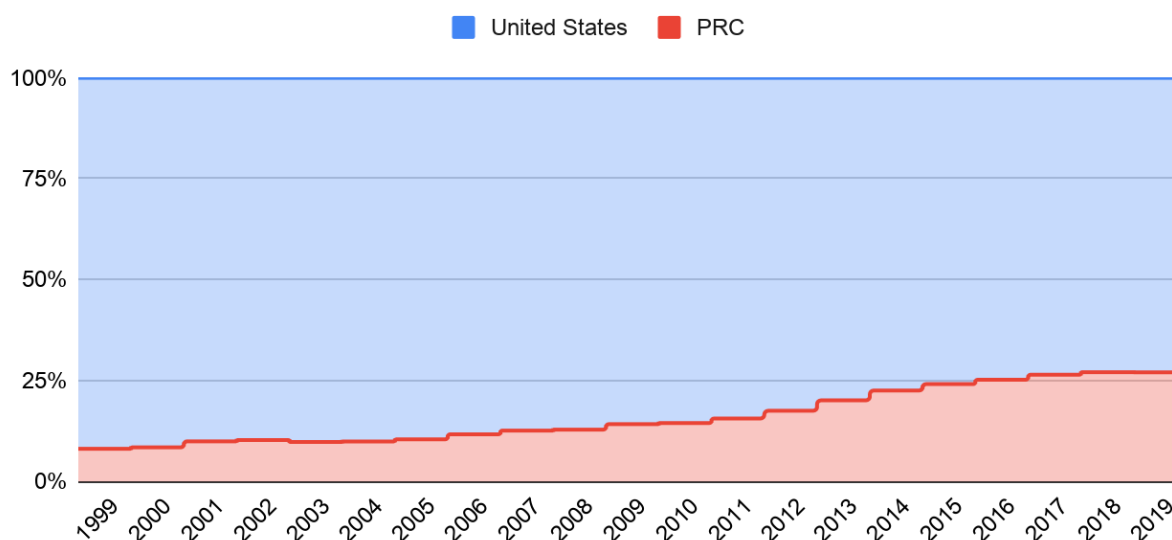
Figure 8: U.S. and PRC Military Expenditures as a Percentage of GDP, 1999-2019



Source: The World Bank, "World Development Indicators," accessed December 7, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?end=2019&locations=US-CN&start=1999&view=chart>.

Similarly, the CCP's steady defense investment of 2 percent of its rapidly growing economy, when weighed against the USG's variable defense investment of a slowly growing economy means PRC defense spending is growing more quickly than USG defense spending. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimates find that PRC military expenditures reached one-third of total U.S. military expenditures in 2016, and the Chinese share of military spending has continued to grow since then.

Figure 9: Share of Military Expenditure in Constant (2018) U.S. Dollars, 1999-2019



Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

PRC defense budgeting has for decades exhibited an asymmetric advantage, slowly but surely growing at a faster rate than that of USG defense spending by drawing on political resolve to track a 2 percent GDP defense expenditure as well as once-explosive economic growth. PLA services enjoy a comparatively predictable budget, which reduces uncertainties endogenous to long-term force planning. This pattern is most advantageous in a long-term peacetime competition: should current trends of PRC economic growth and CCP political resolve to maintain defense spending continue unabated, the PLA is likely to become increasingly well-equipped and develop the potential to adopt a global force posture which rivals that of the United States military. Should the PRC fail to adopt a new growth model to maintain elevated economic growth rates, or should CCP leaders compromise defense spending in favor of other priorities, then this long-term advantage of faster-growing defense spending will be blunted.

Asymmetry: The Costs of PRC Stability Maintenance

Among the PLA's most powerful competitors for funding in the PRC budget is a domestic stability system that, in terms of political importance and coercive capacity, has no U.S.

equivalent. Reflecting the CCP's paramount interest in perpetuating its regime and outsized concerns⁴⁴³ of social unrest, the PRC maintains a costly domestic security apparatus that exceeds the PLA in annual spending. This apparatus, termed "stability maintenance" [维稳], includes CCP control over secret police, courts, and various means by which to manage Chinese public opinion.⁴⁴⁴ Declining economic growth rates and constantly high CCP demand for stability maintenance create enduring challenges for funding the PLA.

The CCP's official stability maintenance budget has historically tracked its national defense spending and publicly exceeded the official defense budget in 2011, when the stability maintenance budget was 624.4 billion RMB and national defense was accorded only 601.1 billion RMB.⁴⁴⁵ Adrian Zenz's research has shown the PRC's stability maintenance spending likely exceeded its external defense expenditures for the first time in 2010 and has maintained the larger share of the budget ever since.⁴⁴⁶ For reasons not made public, CCP leaders have since made efforts to obscure PRC stability maintenance spending. The official stability maintenance budget in 2019 was only 179.78 billion RMB compared to the official 1.19 trillion RMB for national defense.⁴⁴⁷ However, Chinese reporters have uncovered that the *de facto* 2019 stability maintenance budget is at least 1.39 trillion RMB before counting SOE

⁴⁴³ To this point, Andrew Scobell describes the CCP as "ambitious alarmists" who are "preoccupied with maintaining domestic stability and tend to be ultrasensitive to the prospect of chaos." See Andrew Scobell, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on U.S.-China Relations in 2020: Enduring Problems and Emerging Challenges, September 29, 2020, 7-8, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/Scobell_Testimony.pdf.

⁴⁴⁴ Xi Chen, "China at the Tipping Point?: The Rising Cost of Stability," *Journal of Democracy* 24 no. 1, January 2013, 58, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2013.0003>.

⁴⁴⁵ Li Yao and Manfred Elfstrom, "Does Greater Coercive Capacity Increase Overt Repression? Evidence from China," *Journal of Contemporary China*, July 16, 2020, Figure 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1790898>; Chris Buckley, "China internal security spending jumps past army budget," *Reuters*, March 4, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-unrest/china-internal-security-spending-jumps-past-army-budget-idUSTRE7222RA20110305>.

⁴⁴⁶ Adrian Zenz, "China's Domestic Security Spending: An Analysis of Available Data," *China Brief*, March 12, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-domestic-security-spending-analysis-available-data/>.

⁴⁴⁷ Zhao Xiaowen [赵晓雯], "Draft 2019 Financial Budget Announced, Science and Technology Expenditures Rise 13.4%" [2019 年中央财政预算草案公布 科技支出增长 13.4%], *China Internet Information Center* [中国网], March 5, 2019, http://www.dzwww.com/xinwen/jishixinwen/201903/t20190305_18462614.htm; Kelly Olsen, "China's defense spending is growing more slowly. But that doesn't mean military tensions are easing," *CNBC*, March 5, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/03/05/china-defense-budget-slowing-growth-in-2019-military-spending-.html>.

expenditures toward stability maintenance made at a central or provincial government's behest.⁴⁴⁸

Slowing economic growth increases the PRC's opportunity cost for its stability maintenance spending but may also trigger a need for increased stability maintenance operations, which increases budget pressures for other programs in turn. High rates of economic growth are an important component of modern social cohesion in the PRC. Testifying before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Barry Naughton impressed the importance of continued economic prosperity to young Chinese citizens' view of the CCP regime, saying, "a young Chinese person today is not only better, much better off than his parents, he's much better off than he ever thought he could be."⁴⁴⁹ In separate testimony, Anthony Saich pointed out the CCP's continued accrual of debt in order to provide the public goods to which Chinese citizens have become accustomed.⁴⁵⁰ Some CCP elites consider 6% annual GDP growth to be the minimum required needed to "obscure" the PRC's social problems and maintain social cohesion.⁴⁵¹

Even as PRC economic growth slows, PRC stability maintenance expenditures are likely to increase as Xi Jinping imposes more rigid standards of politically acceptable behavior in China and orders them enforced by methods of social control augmented by emerging technologies, for example by proliferating CCTV cameras with facial recognition capabilities and centrally managing the data through a nationwide program called Skynet.⁴⁵² Xi also appears to

⁴⁴⁸ Willy Wo-Lap Lam, "'Stability Maintenance' Gets a Major Boost at the National People's Congress," *China Brief*, March 22, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/stability-maintenance-gets-a-major-boost-at-the-national-peoples-congress/>.

⁴⁴⁹ Barry Naughton, oral testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on The Chinese View of Strategic Competition with the United States, June 24, 2020, 67, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-08/June_24_2020_Hearing_Transcript_0.pdf.

⁴⁵⁰ Anthony Saich, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on U.S.-China Relations in 2020: Enduring Problems and Emerging Challenges, September 29, 2020, 3, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/Saich_Testimony.pdf.

⁴⁵¹ Deng Yuwen [邓聿文], "The CCP's Political Security Faces Nine Challenges" [中共政治安全面临的九大挑战] *BBC News*, trans. *Chinascopes*, January 1, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/chinese-news-47079653>, http://chinascopes.org/archives/17936?doing_wp_cron=1607810669.5800709724426269531250.

⁴⁵² Sheena Greitens, "Domestic Security in China under Xi Jinping," *China Leadership Monitor*, March 1, 2019,

have a heightened concern of Chinese popular resistance to the CCP, with Chinese state media referencing the possible end of the CCP with record frequency since he assumed power.⁴⁵³ Xi's apparent personal proclivities toward finding and suppressing the potential of public unrest against the regime reinforce the likelihood that, while he is in power, the PRC's stability maintenance burden will increase only more rapidly as China's economic growth slows.

In addition to budget allocations, PRC stability maintenance also competes with national defense for human capital and command capacity. Funding for the People's Armed Police (PAP), a paramilitary force tasked with leading the stability maintenance operations which require domestic riot suppression, is officially categorized as part of the PRC's domestic security budget.⁴⁵⁴ The PAP was organized under both the Central Military Commission (CMC) and State Council until PLA reforms in 2017 organized the PAP exclusively under the CMC, with PLA resources responsible for directing PAP operations.⁴⁵⁵ This change in command structure did not change the PAP's mission from stability maintenance to warfighting. PAP mobile detachments are located in areas the CCP is imposing oppressive social control measures on Chinese minorities, such as Xinjiang and Tibet, and other politically important areas, like Beijing.⁴⁵⁶

<https://www.prcleader.org/greitens>.

⁴⁵³ Willy Wo-Lap Lam, "Xi Jinping Warns Against the 'Black Swans' and 'Gray Rhinos' of a Possible Color Revolution," *China Brief*, February 20, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/china-brief-early-warning-xi-jinping-warns-against-the-black-swans-and-gray-rhinos-of-a-possible-color-revolution/>.

⁴⁵⁴ On the PAP's role in riot suppression, see Ma Chengkun, "PLA Response to Widespread Internal Unrest in the Han Homeland," in *The People's Liberation Army and Contingency Planning in China*, eds. Andrew Scobell et al., (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2015), 190-196, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1004292.pdf>. On the PAP's share of the PRC domestic security budget, see Adrian Zenz, "Corralling the People's Armed Police: Centralizing Control to Reflect Centralized Budgets," *China Brief*, April 24, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/corralling-the-peoples-armed-police-centralizing-control-to-reflect-centralized-budgets/>.

⁴⁵⁵ Joel Wuthnow, *China's Other Army: The People's Armed Police in an Era of Reform*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 4-6, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/82/China%20SP%2014%20Final%20for%20Web.pdf?ver=2019-04-16-121756-937>.

⁴⁵⁶ Joel Wuthnow, *China's Other Army: The People's Armed Police in an Era of Reform*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 26, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/82/China%20SP%2014%20Final%20for%20Web.pdf?ver=2019-04-16-121756-937>.

Xi Jinping has publicly called for the PAP to integrate into the PLA joint operational system, a priority the National People's Congress reinforced with the 2020 passage of a revised PAP Law providing for PLA-PAP joint noncombat exercises.⁴⁵⁷ This integration, which Joel Wuthnow assesses as still lacking, repurposes time and resources within the CMC command structure from PLA preparations for warfighting toward the breadth of PAP responsibilities, which continues to include riot suppression and disaster relief.⁴⁵⁸ The PAP regularly deploys to conduct these military operations other than war, taxing command resources that could otherwise be dedicated toward efforts to man, train, and equip the PLA, to the detriment of PLA readiness and lethality.⁴⁵⁹ The potential consequences of the PAP-PLA's unfocused mission set likely extends beyond ground forces. While riot suppression is traditionally a task for the PLAGF rather than the PLAN, the CCG has also recently become involved in stability maintenance operations by capturing Hong Kongers attempting to flee the regime by sea.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ Joel Wuthnow, *China's Other Army: The People's Armed Police in an Era of Reform*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 22, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/82/China%20SP%2014%20Final%20for%20Web.pdf?ver=2019-04-16-121756-937>; PRC Ministry of Justice, *People's Armed Police Law of the People's Republic of China* [中华人民共和国人民武装警察法], June 20, 2020, http://www.moj.gov.cn/Department/content/2020-06/22/592_3251131.html.

⁴⁵⁸ Joel Wuthnow, *China's Other Army: The People's Armed Police in an Era of Reform*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 4-6, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/82/China%20SP%2014%20Final%20for%20Web.pdf?ver=2019-04-16-121756-937>; Joel Wuthnow, "The Re-Conquerors of Hong Kong? A Primer on China's People's Armed Police," *War on the Rocks*, August 12, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/08/the-re-conquerors-of-hong-kong-a-primer-on-chinas-peoples-armed-police/>; *Xinhua*, "Xi Focus: Xi instructs army to complete follow-up flood control work," August 20, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-08/20/c_139305903.htm; PRC Ministry of National Defense, "Armed Police Force," accessed December 12, 2020, <http://eng.mod.gov.cn/ArmedForces/armed.htm>.

⁴⁵⁹ A common concern among U.S. military servicemen, particularly during the height of the Global War on Terror, is that the differing skill sets involved in stability operations and traditional warfighting means committing the military to extended stability operations in fact erodes its readiness for warfighting operations. See Nina M. Serafino, *Peacekeeping and Related Stability Operations: Issues of U.S. Military Involvement* RL33557, January 24, 2007, 12, https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20070124_RL33557_b72fe14e4a4bc6456d1a4d3386c74ac96d52092b.pdf. Readiness is "The ability of military forces to fight and meet the demands of assigned missions." U.S. Department of Defense, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, June 2020, 180, <https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf>.

⁴⁶⁰ Fan Wenxin and Wang Joyu, "China Coast Guard Seizes Hong Kong Activists Fleeing to Taiwan," *Wall Street Journal*, August 27, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-coast-guard-seizes-hong-kong-activists-fleeing-to-taiwan-11598536806>.

Indo-Pacific Strategic Geography

The CCP's maritime transformation takes place within an Indo-Pacific competition theater, and the USG and CCP have unequal claims to the theater's strategic geography. This thesis does not argue that geography is destiny. Rather, it adopts Roy Kamphausen's argument that some geographic features are "decisive," these being "physical features that offer strategic advantages by establishing conditions for either the success or inhibition of military protagonists," with military advantage "conferred on the power that assembles the more adept and mutually reinforcing set of strategies to control this decisive terrain in a conflict."⁴⁶¹ Kamphausen argues that Asia's decisive terrain is its maritime features in "the aggregate of the island chain"⁴⁶² facing the eastern edge of the Asian landmass and straits that provide access to the Western Pacific and that extend laterally between the marginal seas."⁴⁶³ These island chains form chokepoints⁴⁶⁴ that a dominant power can use to restrict naval access. CCP strategists

⁴⁶¹ Roy Kamphausen, "Asia as a Warfighting Environment," in *Strategy in Asia: The Past, Present, and future of Regional Security*, eds. Thomas G. Mahnken and Dan Blumenthal, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 11 & 23.

⁴⁶² The island chain Kamphausen references is a dominating concept of Asian strategic geography in USG and CCP thought. Toshi Yoshihara and James Holmes' research convincingly demonstrate the origins of this idea in Chinese certainty that the USG has for decades executed a Cold War policy of containment on the CCP by arraying military power along the Pacific islands on China's maritime periphery, forming three island chains with which to constrain PRC maritime development. While different Chinese sources sometimes offer various definitions of which features constitute which island chains, the broadest reading defines the first island chain as including the Aleutian Islands, Kuril Islands, Japanese Islands, Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the Philippines, and the Greater Sunda Islands. The second island chain runs through Guam, and the third through Hawaii. See Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy 2nd ed.*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 75-82; Yang Ru [杨茹] and Huang Chao [黄超], "The PLAN's First Training in the High Seas: 252 Submarines Purge Their Shortcomings and Tear Through the Island Chain" [中国海军第一次远洋训练: 252 潜艇排除故障撕破岛链], *Xinhua*, August 13, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-08/13/c_1121476003.htm;

⁴⁶³ Roy Kamphausen, "Asia as a Warfighting Environment," in *Strategy in Asia: The Past, Present, and future of Regional Security*, eds. Thomas G. Mahnken and Dan Blumenthal, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 17.

⁴⁶⁴ A maritime chokepoint is a narrow waterway, such as a canal linking two larger bodies of water or a strait, which limits the capacity of transit and is not easily bypassed. Maritime chokepoints are decisive terrain: militarily, a state can use a maritime chokepoint as a preliminary step toward control over a closed or semi-closed maritime theater, ensuring or denying military and commercial access through a restrictive waterway where the vessels are most vulnerable, i.e., securing or denying another state's SLOC, in ways and at times opportune to frustrate an adversary's larger naval operation or prepare one's own. Control over a maritime chokepoint confers decided strategic advantages pertinent to deterring or escalating strategic competition, and some analysts consider control over multiple chokepoints to be the keys to hegemonic power. See Milan Vego, *Maritime Strategy and Sea Control: Theory and Practice*, (London: Routledge, 2016), 188-189 & 213 endnote 2; Milan Vego, *Maritime Strategy and Sea Denial: Theory and Practice*, (London: Routledge, 2019), 301; Jamie McGrath, "There Are No Strategic Chokepoints," *Center for International Maritime Security*, June 3, 2020, <http://cimsec.org/there-are-no-strategic-chokepoints/43708>; Robert J. Hanks, *The Unnoticed Challenge: Soviet Maritime Strategy and the Global Choke Points*, (Cambridge: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1980), 10.

appear to adopt a similar mentality but adopt a broader view including chokepoints west of China, which attend to SLOCs through Southeast Asia into the Indian Ocean.

Peacetime dominance over maritime Asia's decisive terrain confers wartime advantages. The CCP recognizes that the USG has traditionally held the advantage on China's eastern periphery and has a dedicated line of effort, dominated by the CCP's defense establishment, to challenge this advantage. Yet a major thrust of CCP maritime transformation extends in the opposite direction by consolidating commercial investment at maritime chokepoints to China's west, developing a competitive advantage for the CCP over SLOCs running through the Indian Ocean.

Asymmetry: Two Maps: USG and CCP Views of Asia's Strategic Geography

Though both USG and CCP planners recognize the same island chains as strategic features in the Western Pacific, CCP interests and commercial responses emphasize SLOCs through island chains toward China's West, reflecting dependence on maritime energy imports rather than a narrow focus on the eastern island chains themselves. While the USG remained narrowly focused on the security implications of the first and second island chains, the CCP built coercive maritime power that can be mobilized to military purposes against the USG along its western SLOCs.

Map 1: Map of USG Focus: The First and Second Island Chains



Source: U.S. Department of Defense, “Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2011,” 2011, 23, https://archive.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2011_CMPR_Final.pdf.

U.S. and CCP regional force postures reflect distinct political interests toward Asia’s strategic geography. The U.S. maintains relative dominance over its view of the island chains with a forward military presence supported by alliances and military partnerships with other countries east of China.⁴⁶⁵ The USG’s demonstrated diplomatic interest is to maintain its alliance commitments and sustain them with a forward deployed military as a deterrent against

⁴⁶⁵ Michael Green et al., “Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence, and Partnerships,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, January 2016, 32-35, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/160119_Green_AsiaPacificRebalance2025_Web_0.pdf; Roy Kamphausen, “Asia as a Warfighting Environment,” in *Strategy in Asia: The Past, Present, and future of Regional Security*, eds. Thomas G. Mahnken and Dan Blumenthal, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 18-19.

provocative military behavior.⁴⁶⁶ Indo-Pacific allies and partners serve as a force multiplier for this effort by aligning their own national policies on maritime access with the USG and by committing their diplomats and militaries to advocate for those standards.⁴⁶⁷

In an eroding deference to U.S. and allied military preponderance over these island chains,⁴⁶⁸ the CCP adopted a two-pronged approach toward the island chains to its east: 1) develop land-based long-range strike capabilities able to delay, degrade, and ultimately destroy U.S. and allied bases in the Indo-Pacific as well as U.S. forces flowing into the theater; and 2) escalate the costs of U.S. military operations in and around the first island chain with gray zone activities such as provocative maneuvering of PLAN vessels or harassing U.S. warships with paramilitary CCG or PAFMM vessels.⁴⁶⁹

In addition to securing access through Asia's eastern island chains, the CCP also has an outsized interest in securing its SLOCs to China's west, by which China receives most of its energy imports. PRC economic growth increased oil consumption: the PRC has been a net oil importer since 1993, and by the 2000s, over 80% of PRC oil imports passed through the Strait of Malacca, at the southern tip of the First Island Chain.⁴⁷⁰ CCP leaders recognize the risks inherent in depending on energy imports through one key strait and have taken mitigating

⁴⁶⁶ Mira Rapp-Hooper, *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 40-41; Hal Brands, "Choosing Primacy: U.S. Strategy and Global Order at the Dawn of the Post-Cold War Era," *Texas National Security Review* 1, iss. 2, (March 1, 2018), 8-33, 22-24, <https://tnsr.org/2018/02/choosing-primacy-u-s-strategy-global-order-dawn-post-cold-war-era-2/>.

⁴⁶⁷ Mark S. Bell et al., "Assessing the U.S. Commitment to Allies in Asia and Beyond," *The German Marshall Fund of the United States*, March 23, 2018, 10, <https://www.gmfus.org/publications/assessing-us-commitment-allies-asia-and-beyond>; Ashley J. Tellis, "Seeking Alliances and Partnerships: The Long Road to Confederationism in U.S. Grand Strategy," in *Strategic Asia 2014-15 U.S. Alliances and Partnerships at the Center of Global Power*, eds. Ashley J. Tellis, Abraham M. Denmark, and Greg Chaffin, (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2014), 18-19.

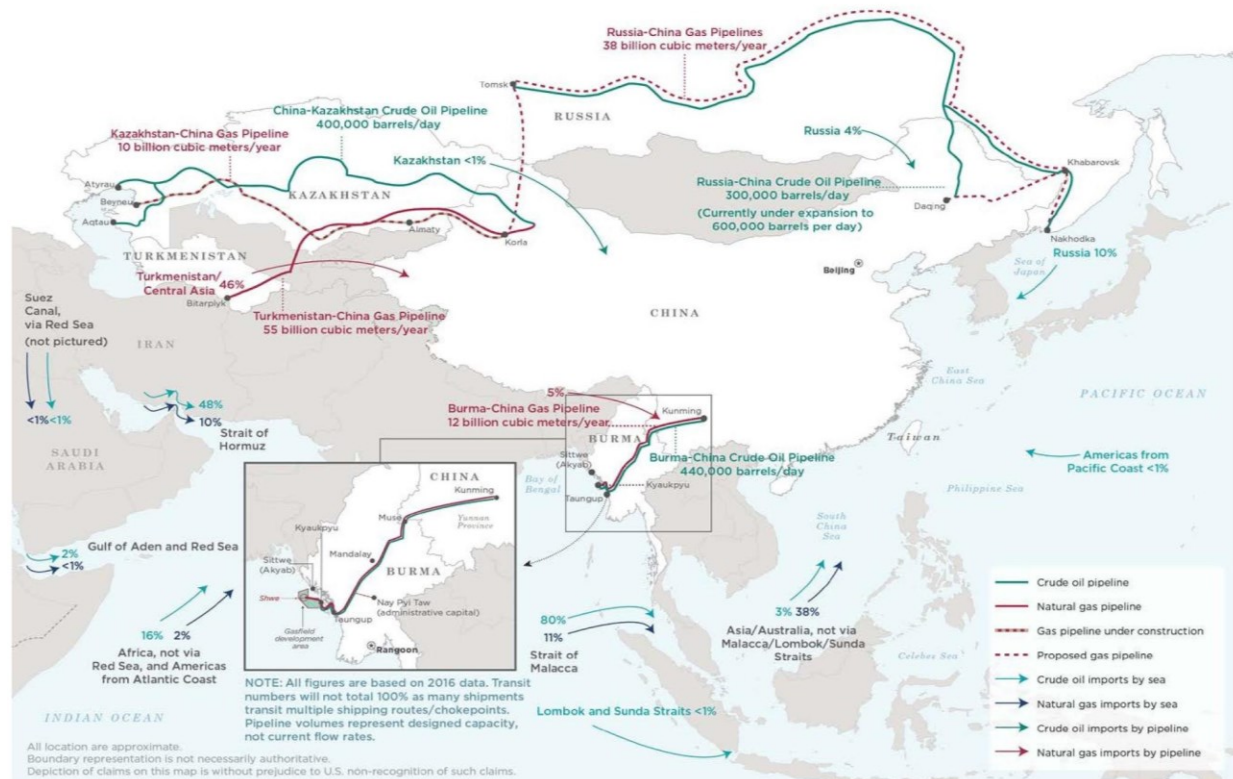
⁴⁶⁸ This deference, likely arising from sober PLA assessments of the balance of power, restrains the potential range of PLAN operations. For example, the PLA AMS *Science of Military Strategy* published in 2013 describes the PLAN operational area as constrained within the first island chain. "第三, 海军的作战海区, 在今后一个较长时期内, 主要是第一岛链和沿该岛链的沿海区, 以及岛链以内的黄海, 东海和南海海区。" Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), 208.

⁴⁶⁹ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020, 60-64, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/2020_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf.

⁴⁷⁰ Michal Meidan, "The Implications of China's Energy-Import Boom," *Survival* 56, no. 3 (June 1, 2014), 179-200, 180 & 186, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2014.920147>.

steps.⁴⁷¹ First, CCP has attempted to reduce its reliance on energy shipments through the Malacca Strait by increasing overland pipeline capacity to import crude oil and natural gas; these successes have only been partially successful, as evidenced by the PRC's continued reliance on Middle Eastern and African countries for oil imports.⁴⁷² Second, the CCP has increased its commercial leverage along key waterways along its western SLOC.

Map 2: Map of CCP's Focus: China's Energy Import Transit Routes (2016 Data)



Source: U.S. Department of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017," May 15, 2017, 44, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017_China_Military_Power_Report.PDF.

⁴⁷¹ In 2003, General Secretary Hu Jintao called attention to the PRC's potential vulnerability should an adversary gain control of the Strait, which is less than 2 miles wide at its narrowest point, after which state media began referring to the vulnerability as the PRC's "Malacca dilemma." See Ian Storey, "China's 'Malacca Dilemma,'" *China Brief*, April 12, 2006, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-malacca-dilemma/>; U.S. Energy Information Administration, "The Strait of Malacca, a key oil trade chokepoint, links the Indian and Pacific Oceans," August 11, 2017, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=32452>.

⁴⁷² *Hellenic Shipping News*, "Chinese Thirst For Crude Oil Growing; Nearly Equals The Total Production Of Saudi Arabia," August 7, 2019, <https://www.hellenicshippingnews.com/chinese-thirst-for-crude-oil-growing-nearly-equals-the-total-production-of-saudi-arabia/>; U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis Executive Summary: China," September 30, 2020, 5-6, https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/China/china.pdf; U.S. Energy Information Administration, "China's crude oil imports surpassed 10 million barrels per day in 2019," March 23, 2020, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=43216>; U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis Executive Summary: China," September 30, 2020, 6, https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/China/china.pdf.

Trend: Consolidating PRC Commercial Power at Western Maritime Chokepoints

Chinese investment through the BRI's maritime component, called the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI), is concentrating PRC power through economic means at key maritime chokepoints to China's west, such as the Strait of Malacca. Beyond securing China's energy imports, Chinese commercial dominance and logistics software in key ports can give the CCP a significant surveillance capability over maritime supply chains with competitive. This trend poses a dangerous but unannounced whole-of-society challenge to USG dominance over Asia's decisive terrain.

Chinese investments at maritime chokepoints are unsurprising and not inherently competitive. Maritime chokepoints are geographic realities for shipping companies and business opportunities for port operators and maritime support services, such as ship repair and maintenance, ship brokering and chartering, and bunkering; because of the rich business opportunity, maritime support services are likely to be more concentrated at chokepoint ports.⁴⁷³ These services help mitigate potential risks involved in traversing maritime chokepoints, which in the case of oil tankers could result in delays rippling across the global energy market.⁴⁷⁴ In accordance with this commercial reality, Chinese financial investments through the MSRI are arrayed along maritime chokepoints which happen to be critical for energy shipping along the Eurasian landmass. The Maritime Silk Road follows a SLOC beginning in the Mediterranean Sea, running through the Suez Canal and Strait of Hormuz, out through the Gulf of Aden, across the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, down through the Strait of Malacca, and up past the Gulf of Tonkin, where it meets the major ports on China's coastline.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷³ Rockford Weitz, "Strategic Maritime Chokepoints: Perspectives from the Global Shipping and Port Sectors," in *Eurasia's Maritime Rise and Global Security: From the Indian Ocean to Pacific Asia and the Arctic*, ed. Geoffrey F. Gresh, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 20 & 25-26.

⁴⁷⁴ U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Maritime chokepoints are critical to global energy security," August 1, 2017, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=32292>.

⁴⁷⁵ Matthew Funaiole and Jonathan Hillman, "China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative: Economic Drivers and Challenges," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, April 2, 2018, 20-23, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-maritime-silk-road>.

Map 3: Visualization of the Maritime Silk Road



Source: Michael J. Green et al., "China's Maritime Silk Road: Strategic and Economic Implications for the Indo-Pacific Region," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, April 2, 2018, 20, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-maritime-silk-road>.

The PRC's investments in key commercial ports along the MSRI extend CCP power and influence over Eurasia's maritime chokepoints. Large MSRI projects have made the PRC the dominant investor in Greece's Port of Piraeus, Egypt's Suez Canal, Pakistan's Gwadar Port, and Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port.⁴⁷⁶ With the large state-backed investment the PRC can direct to these port projects through the MSRI, the PRC can commercially dominate these ports with

⁴⁷⁶ Costas Paris, "China's Cosco Pours More Money Into Greek Port," *Wall Street Journal*, November 12, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-cosco-pours-more-money-into-greek-port-11573581625>; Silvia Armano, "China bought most of Greece's main port and now it wants to make it the biggest in Europe," *CNBC*, November 15, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/11/15/china-wants-to-turn-greece-piraeus-port-into-europe-biggest.html>; *Xinhua*, "Spotlight: China, Egypt join hands to write new chapter of Suez Canal development," November 18, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-11/18/c_138563688.htm; Jacob Mardell, "The BRI in Pakistan: China's flagship economic corridor," *Mercator Institute for China Studies*, May 20, 2020, <https://merics.org/en/analysis/bri-pakistan-chinas-flagship-economic-corridor>; Devin Thorne and Ben Spevack, "Harbored Ambitions: How China's Port Investments are Strategically Reshaping the Indo-Pacific," *C4ADS*, April 17, 2018, 47-53, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/566ef8b4d8af107232d5358a/t/5ad5e20ef950b777a94b55c3/1523966489456/Harbored+Ambitions.pdf>.

capital-intensive infrastructure projects that raise barriers of entry for companies or countries competing for market share at the same port facilities.⁴⁷⁷

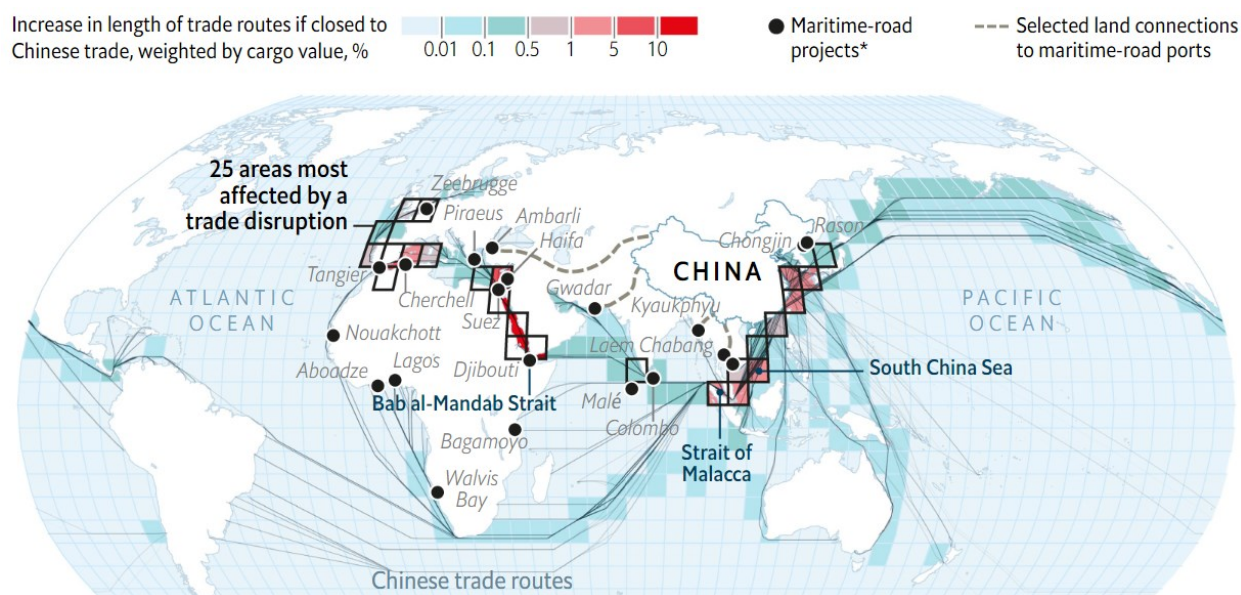
The MSRI's scope and scale indicate it is not a parochial or transient interest for the CCP: while weak disclosure requirements obfuscate the precise amount of Chinese investment in foreign ports, a *Financial Times* and King's College London joint investigation estimates that companies from the PRC and Hong Kong have announced or completed agreements for 40 overseas port projects worth approximately \$45.6 billion between 2010 and 2017, with funding details for another dozen projects unannounced.⁴⁷⁸ Nor are strategically-positioned MSRI investments strictly an artefact of market demand for Chinese capital: an assessment from an official Marxist research center in the PRC describes strengthening PRC control over existing SLOCs and building new ones as an MSRI objective.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁷ Rockford Weitz, "Strategic Maritime Chokepoints: Perspectives from the Global Shipping and Port Sectors," in *Eurasia's Maritime Rise and Global Security: From the Indian Ocean to Pacific Asia and the Arctic*, ed. Geoffrey F. Gresh, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 25.

⁴⁷⁸ James Kynge et al., "How China rules the waves," *Financial Times*, January 12, 2017, <https://ig.ft.com/sites/china-ports/>.

⁴⁷⁹ "拉紧相互利益纽带，加强海上通道互联互通建设。" Duan Huaming [段华明], "Maritime Silk Road for the 21st Century: The Great Maritime Thoroughfare to Realizing the Chinese Dream" [21 世纪海上丝绸之路：实现中国梦的海上大通道], *Qiushi*, July 18, 2014, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/31773/35507/35510/35524/Document/1527447/1527447.htm>.

Map 4: Maritime Silk Road Project Clusters Along Eurasian Chokepoints



Source: *The Economist*, "China's 'maritime road' looks more defensive than imperialist," September 28, 2019, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2019/09/28/chinas-maritime-road-looks-more-defensive-than-imperialist>.

Current MSRI investments appear to presage Chinese dominance over global maritime shipping infrastructure. In early 2020, Isaac Kardon reported that PRC firms partially owned or operated 94 ports globally and had contracted projects developing the infrastructure of hundreds more.⁴⁸⁰ The ports partially owned or operated by Chinese firms are geographically dispersed, with an approximate distribution across the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans; among these, the greatest concentration in the greater IOR, to include the Mediterranean Sea.⁴⁸¹ Cutting across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, Chinese port investments in Africa circle the continent and reach nearly every African country with a coastline.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸⁰ Isaac Kardon, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on China's Military Power Projection and U.S. National Interests, February 20, 2020, 2, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Kardon_Revised%20Written%20Testimony_Feb2020.pdf.

⁴⁸¹ Isaac Kardon, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on China's Military Power Projection and U.S. National Interests, February 20, 2020, 2, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Kardon_Revised%20Written%20Testimony_Feb2020.pdf.

⁴⁸² The exceptions being Senegal, the Gambia, Liberia, Benin, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tunisia, and the Western Sahara territory. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020, 174, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/2020_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf.

The commercial aspect of Chinese maritime influence is not satisfied with financial stakes across the world's seaports; they must also be centrally linked. PRC policy since 1996 has emphasized the integration of China's domestic seaports into a cohesive system, defined not by "fragmented competition" [分散竞争] between the ports but rather "orderly cooperation" [有序协同], as a way to transform the PRC maritime shipping industry from "large" to "strong."⁴⁸³ Following a similar logic, PRC officials have championed a port cooperation system along the MSRI, for example by increasing Chinese contractors' abilities to bid and work on foreign port projects; offering Chinese expertise for capacity building in port management; and advocating logistics information sharing through memoranda of understanding or the PRC Ministry of Transport's LOGINK logistics information platform.⁴⁸⁴

LOGINK joined the International Port Community Systems Association (IPCSA) in 2019, offering the Chinese government a membership in the global port systems community involved in setting international standards for shipping logistics, such as supply chain visibility.⁴⁸⁵ Media coverage of a report jointly produced by LOGINK, IPSCA, and the Chinese corporation Alibaba entitled "Enabling Logistics Visibility by Interconnecting Logistics Information Service Systems in a Standardised Way" recommends increasing data flows between port systems globally by standardizing the way they are connected—a service LOGINK provides by connecting ports in Southeast Asia across state borders.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸³ Viviana Zhu, "Large but not Strong: The Challenges for China's Domestic Ports," *Institut Montaigne*, June 2019, 10-12, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/documents/china-trends/China-trends-2-print-web.pdf>.

⁴⁸⁴ Liu Xiaoming, "Promoting Pragmatic Cooperation in Sea Ports Along the Belt and Road," (presentation, Szczecin, June 15, 2018), <http://ceec-china-maritime.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/promoting-pragmatic-cooperation-in-sea-ports-along-the-belt-and-road-2.pdf>.

⁴⁸⁵ *Port Technology International*, "China's LOGINK inaugurated into IPCSA," December 10, 2019, <https://www.porttechnology.org/news/chinas-logink-inaugurated-into-ipcsa/>; Gavin van Marle, "Task Force drives towards global standards for supply chain visibility," *The Loadstar*, October 25, 2019, <https://theloadstar.com/task-force-drives-towards-global-standards-for-supply-chain-visibility/>.

⁴⁸⁶ Rob O'Dwyer, "Data sharing standards for logistics chain recommended by new report," *Smart Maritime Network*, October 21, 2019, <https://smartmaritimenetwork.com/2019/10/21/data-sharing-standards-for-logistics-chain-recommended-by-new-report/>; Trade Development News, "LOGINK China Joins International Port Community Systems Association," December 10, 2019, *Global Trade Development Week*, <https://www.kwglobaltrade.com/post/logink-china-joins-international-port-community-systems-association>.

Should LOGINK's services become standard in the commercial maritime shipping industry, the PRC Ministry of Transportation will have successfully formed a network structure by which it can asymmetrically derive and exert coercive economic power, imposing costs on other countries. Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman's research into this sort of weaponized interdependence arising from economic globalization has found that networks such as LOGINK proposes have a "panopticon effect" whereby "states' direct surveillance abilities may be radically outstripped by their capacity to tap into the information-gathering and information-generating activities of networks of private actors," in this case the ostensibly private port facilities transmitting data through a Chinese government network.⁴⁸⁷ Farrell and Newman find that "panopticon" capabilities confer decisive informational advantages, as exhibited by the USG's own erstwhile panopticon in northern Virginia, which centralized much of the physical fiber optic cables supporting global internet transmissions and gave the USG unparalleled surveillance capabilities in the early stages of the Global War on Terror.⁴⁸⁸ LOGINK's proliferation among Indo-Pacific ports and the PRC's advocacy for its use to become a global standard would introduce a PRC panopticon capability to illicitly surveil and potentially coerce an adversary's commercial maritime actors.

Asymmetry: Latent Military Power of Chinese Commercial Systems Threaten Flow Security

Systems such as LOGINK and the PRC's commercial investment in civilian ports become even more strategically consequential given that the CCP's military strategy considers civilian assets to have latent military purpose. The PLA has a critical operational asymmetry with the United States military insofar as PLA strategic documents explicitly call for mobilizing civilian systems to military purposes, matching a growing literature in which Chinese military analysts

⁴⁸⁷ Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman, "Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion," *International Security* 44, no. 1 (2019), 42-79, 55, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00351.

⁴⁸⁸ Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman, "Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion," *International Security* 44, no. 1 (2019), 42-79, 60-63 & 70-73, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00351.

describe civilian and military information systems as simply two facets within a single network domain. In times of crisis, the PLA may move beyond the commercial logic of maritime shipping and LOGINK's potential panopticon surveillance capabilities, instead using such ostensibly civilian assets for overt military purposes. These are most prominent in the PLA's effort to develop informatized warfare capabilities and to secure strategic strongpoints in place of overseas bases.

Informatized Warfare. All PLA military strategic guidance released since 2004 define the character of future war to be “informatized” [信息化], in which information collection and distribution “shapes all aspects of society, including the economy and governance, as well as warfare.”⁴⁸⁹ PLA NDU Vice President and editor of the NDU version of the *Science of Military Strategy* Lt. General Xiao Tianliang [肖天亮] described the “essential character” [本质特征] of informatized war to be “systems confrontation”⁴⁹⁰ [体系对抗] between systems of digitally interlinked platforms.⁴⁹¹ PLA strategists assert that military conflict under the framework of informatized war inextricably entangles civilian networks into systems confrontation.

The 2013 AMS *Science of Military Strategy*, for example, calls for building a modern military system by “residing the military within the civilian” [寓军于民], referring to concealing military purpose and capabilities under the veneer of civilian labels.⁴⁹² Similarly, PLA literature

⁴⁸⁹ M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 174-176.

⁴⁹⁰ PLA literature refers to systems confrontation as well as systems destruction [体系破击]; the former is a recognition that the PLA's future adversaries will also likely have digitally interlinked military systems rather than discrete forces, and the latter is an approach to exploit an adversary's interlinkages by destroying key nodes in the adversary's information systems to paralyze their command operations. See M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 220; Jeffrey Engstrom, *Systems Confrontation and Systems Destruction Warfare: How the Chinese People's Liberation Army Seeks to Wage Modern Warfare*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2018), x-xi, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1700/RR1708/RAND_RR1708.pdf.

⁴⁹¹ Xiao Tianliang [肖天亮], “Comprehensively Advance Strategic Planning for National Defense and Military Modernization” [全面推进国防和军队现代化的战略部署], *Qiushi*, May 13, 2018, http://www.qstheory.cn/lqikan/2018-05/13/c_1122824801.htm.

⁴⁹² Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), 271.

describes civilian and military information systems as existing within a single “network domain” whereby “military and civilian spheres are not distinct; in fact, they constantly intersect.”⁴⁹³

As such, the PLA’s discussion of systems confrontation includes an information warfare component which targets an adversary’s civilian networks, such as civil infrastructure or commercial entities, potentially with Chinese civilian networks.⁴⁹⁴ An adversary’s seaports integrated with a PRC Ministry of Transportation information system such as LOGINK provides the PLA precisely this opportunity to marshal ostensibly civilian government resources to damage the adversary covertly or overtly. Without specifying LOGINK in particular, the USG appears attuned to the threat the CCP poses to U.S. maritime infrastructure, describing the PRC as “a persistent cyber espionage threat to the United States military, economy, and critical infrastructure” in its 2020 National Maritime Cybersecurity Plan on cybersecurity risks in critical ship and port systems.⁴⁹⁵

LOGINK is the most high-profile case of a civilian asset along the MSRI which may be harnessed to coercive or military effect, but it is not the only one. A Chinese SOE has is also building what it calls the “Blue Ocean Information Network” [蓝海信息网络] composed of permanent maritime sensors collecting and relaying hydrographic, meteorological, and marine traffic data to the SOE. PLA researchers have noted the potential value of this system, which effectively provides near-permanent real-time maritime domain awareness,⁴⁹⁶ for naval

⁴⁹³ Joe McReynolds, “China’s Military Strategy for Network Warfare,” in *China’s Evolving Military Strategy*, ed. Joe McReynolds, (Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2017), 222-223.

⁴⁹⁴ Joe McReynolds, “China’s Military Strategy for Network Warfare,” in *China’s Evolving Military Strategy*, ed. Joe McReynolds, (Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2017), 222-223; Larry M. Wortzel, *The Chinese People’s Liberation Army and Information Warfare*, (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College Press, 2014), 11, <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/2263.pdf>; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020, 58-59, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/2020_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf.

⁴⁹⁵ U.S. White House, *National Maritime Cybersecurity Plan to the National Strategy for Maritime Security*, December 2020, 12, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/12.2.2020-National-Maritime-Cybersecurity-Plan.pdf>.

⁴⁹⁶ Maritime domain awareness is “the ability to detect, identify, and track vessels at sea.” It is a largely underdeveloped capability in Southeast Asia that has historically been conferred through platforms that are expensive to operate and maintain such as the P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft. Gregory B. Poling, “From Orbit to Ocean—Fixing Southeast Asia’s Remote-Sensing Blind Spots,” *Naval War College Review* 74, no. 1 (Winter 2021), 57-76, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol74/iss1/8>.

operations. Corporate officials of the SOE running the Blue Ocean Information Network aspire to proliferate these sensors along the MSRI by 2035 and globally by 2050.⁴⁹⁷

The CCP also makes use of space-based assets for maritime domain awareness. The PRC operates a robust constellation of reconnaissance satellites, many of which are dedicated to the task of monitoring maritime spaces. Most important are the Haiyang ocean observation satellites and the Yaogan reconnaissance satellites.⁴⁹⁸ Although Chinese state media describe these satellites as having scientific research functions, they also comprise a critical link in the PLA's situational awareness; triangulating ship location and tracking their movements are capabilities that are as useful for missile targeting as they are for scientific research.⁴⁹⁹ The bureaucracy of space policy in the PRC supports the assessment that military resides within the civilian with regard to space policy as well. The PLA Strategic Support Force, which is responsible for the PLA's capabilities regarding space, cyber, electronic warfare, and psychological warfare, and other military bodies have important oversight roles in most of the PRC's space activities; Alex Bowe assesses that the PRC's "space policy in effect allows

⁴⁹⁷ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020, 59-60, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/2020_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf; J. Michael Dahm, "Exploring China's Unmanned Ocean Network," *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, June 16, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/exploring-chinas-unmanned-ocean-network/>. The U.S. company Sofar Ocean is leading a similar effort to proliferate sensors throughout the world's oceans, Sofar Ocean's sensors move along ocean currents and cannot be relied upon to surveil the marine traffic of a maritime space. Moreover, Sofar Ocean's sensors are not as sophisticated as those used by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, while the Blue Ocean Information Network appears to benefit from government and public funds. Andrew Freedman, "Company deploys sensors over half the world's oceans to improve weather forecasts," *Washington Post*, December 18, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2020/12/18/ocean-observing-sofar-buoys/>.

⁴⁹⁸ While Yaogan satellites are used for reconnaissance generally, Yaogan-31 satellites in particular are designated for ocean reconnaissance able to triangulate radio transmissions to locate and track vessels. Andrew Jones, "China launches trio of Yaogan-31 ocean reconnaissance satellites," *SpaceNews*, February 24, 2021, <https://spacenews.com/china-launches-trio-of-yaogan-31-ocean-reconnaissance-satellites/>. Also see Andrew Jones, "China launches Haiyang-1D ocean observation satellite," *SpaceNews*, June 10, 2020, <https://spacenews.com/china-launches-haiyang-1d-ocean-observation-satellite/>.

⁴⁹⁹ *Xinhua*, "China Focus: China launches new satellite to monitor ocean environment," September 21, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-09/21/c_139385291.htm; Andrew S. Erickson, "Satellites Support Growing PLA Maritime Monitoring and Targeting Capabilities," *China Brief*, February 10, 2011, <https://jamestown.org/program/satellites-support-growing-pla-maritime-monitoring-and-targeting-capabilities/>.

Beijing to continue developing military space capabilities while publicly claiming to oppose militarization of space.”⁵⁰⁰

Strategic Strongpoints. PRC investments along the MSRI also confer physical power projection benefits to the PLA. PLA strategists describe building “strategic strongpoints” [战略支点] overseas that rely upon the Mainland, radiate to China’s periphery, and goes toward the Two Oceans region to provide support for overseas military operations or to act as a forward base for deploying military forces.⁵⁰¹ While no official definition for “strategic strongpoint” exists, Chinese officials have used the term to describe foreign ports with strategic value,⁵⁰² including civilian ports along the MSRI.⁵⁰³ Seaports along the MSRI with significant Chinese investment or which are owned or operated by Chinese firms are thus able to covertly provide peacetime logistics and intelligence capabilities even without formal military access agreements with the host country,⁵⁰⁴ a 2010 National Defense Mobilization Law and 2016 National Defense Transportation Law require key construction projects, including seaports along the MSRI, to be

⁵⁰⁰ Alexander Bowe, “China’s Pursuit of Space Power Status and Implications for the United States,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, April 11, 2019, 4, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/USCC_China's%20Space%20Power%20Goals.pdf.

⁵⁰¹ “二要构建依托本土、辐射周边、走向两洋的海外战略支点，为海外军事行动提供支撑，或作为部署海外军事力量的前进基地，在相关地区发挥政治军事影响力，与本土战略布局形成内外兼顾、远近衔接、互为支撑的态势。” Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), 254.

⁵⁰² Analysts at the U.S. Naval War College note that all ports Chinese officials term strategic strongpoints are 1) strategically located along important SLOCs and maritime chokepoints; 2) have high-level coordination between Chinese state, Party, and commercial entities; 3) have extensive Chinese commercial investment; and 4) have dual-use functions with potential or actual military use. Isaac B. Kardon, Conor M. Kennedy, and Peter A. Dutton, “China Maritime Report No. 7: Gwadar: China’s Potential Strategic Strongpoint in Pakistan,” *U.S. Naval War College*, August 1, 2020, 1, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/7>.

⁵⁰³ Peter A. Dutton, Isaac B. Kardon, and Conor M. Kennedy, “China Maritime Report No. 6: Djibouti: China’s First Overseas Strategic Strongpoint,” *U.S. Naval War College*, April 1, 2020, 1, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/6>; Conor Kennedy, “Strategic Strong Points and Chinese Naval Strategy,” *China Brief*, March 22, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/strategic-strong-points-and-chinese-naval-strategy/>.

⁵⁰⁴ This is not to say that the MSRI has secretly built a chain of PLA naval bases. The PRC’s strategic strongpoints along the MSRI, even positioned at maritime chokepoints and interlinked with foreign ports through LOGINK, are not equipped to function as naval bases sufficient to sustain a protracted high-intensity naval conflict; in fact, the PRC’s interest in their commercial function and in foreign MSRI ports as nodes for PRC diplomatic outreach are more likely to make these ports a net liability in the event of a naval conflict. See Isaac Kardon, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on China’s Military Power Projection and U.S. National Interests, February 20, 2020, 7-8, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Kardon_Revised%20Written%20Testimony_Feb2020.pdf; Joshua T. White, “China’s Indian Ocean Ambitions: Investment, Influence, and Military Advantage,” *Brookings*, June 2020, 11, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FP_20200615_chinas_indian_ocean_ambitions_white-1.pdf.

built to military standards and further financially incentivize the private firms undertaking these projects to make additional contributions to national defense mobilization.⁵⁰⁵

By situating the military within the civilian, the PRC's consolidation of commercial power along the MSRI conceals latent military capabilities whereby the PLA is able to make use of ostensibly commercial investments to military benefit at critical maritime chokepoints along the island chains which make up Asia's decisive terrain. CCP and PLA officials appear to treat overt commercial maritime and latent naval power as an original Chinese approach to sea power distinct from the Mahanian tradition; reflecting this position, some analysts, such as NDU Professor and PLAN Colonel Liang Feng [梁芳], have assessed the USG as being overly reliant on military tools to secure SLOCs to destabilizing effect.⁵⁰⁶ To that end, strategic PRC investments along the MSRI does not appear to pose a traditional sea power threat of a rising expeditionary navy challenging a dominant maritime hegemon.⁵⁰⁷

The emergent commercial and latent military influence that the CCP accrues through strategic investments along the MSRI pose a threat to U.S. and global flow security. Global flows refer to: 1) the functional flows of international trade and travel making possible supply chains, technology transfer, and political exchange across state borders; and 2) the global ecosystems such as oceanic currents or atmospheric circulation making these flows possible.⁵⁰⁸ The functional global flows most pertinent for security considerations are overwhelmingly

⁵⁰⁵ Isaac Kardon, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on China's Military Power Projection and U.S. National Interests, February 20, 2020, 6 & 13, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Kardon_Revised%20Written%20Testimony_Feb2020.pdf.

⁵⁰⁶ Liang Feng [梁芳], "Theory, Practice, and Revelations About the U.S. Control of Sea Lines of Communication" [美国控制海上战略通道的理论与实践与启示], *Periodical of Ocean University of China* [中国海洋大学学报社会科学版] 5, (2019), 39-46, <http://www.xml-data.cn/ZGHYDXXBSHKXB/html/619be4bc-7710-48c4-bf20-3f5c2fd3f6c3.htm>.

⁵⁰⁷ The classical example of this is the Anglo-German naval arms race between 1898 and 1914. See, Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy 2nd ed.*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 144-149.

⁵⁰⁸ Tomas Ries, "Global Flow Security: A Conceptual Framework," in *Global Flow Security: A New Security Agenda for the Transatlantic Community in 2030*, eds. Erik Brattberg and Daniel S. Hamilton, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2014), 6-8, https://archive.transatlanticrelations.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Global_Flow.pdf.

maritime, with global air traffic tightly entwined with maritime traffic through global SLOCs.⁵⁰⁹

Global flows and the interstate interdependencies which arise thereby are made possible by the heavily-accessed but unowned global commons, which are for the same reasons highly vulnerable to exogenous shocks, such as overexploitation by free riders.⁵¹⁰

The PRC's MSRI investments are more deeply integrating the CCP into the system of global maritime flows, with greatest emphasis on investments near strategic Eurasian chokepoints, increasing the system's vulnerability to CCP policy.⁵¹¹ In this case, some projects along the MSRI make global maritime flows susceptible to PRC interference should the CCP elect to dominate maritime chokepoints with the commercial or latent military power it is building and disrupt the maritime flow of goods and resources to the United States. The PRC is approaching a position of power over the United States that the U.S. already holds over the PRC: Chinese vulnerability to the U.S. in the case of the Malacca Dilemma is precisely an issue of PRC maritime flow security.

USG and CCP patterns of behavior with regard to the maritime commons suggest the CCP may be more willing to directly disrupt U.S. maritime flow security than the USG would to the PRC. Both states appear willing to ignore international law in pursuit of domestic interests. For example, both the U.S. and PRC have hedged against fully endorsing UNCLOS, which in governing maritime commons offers a framework for sustaining global maritime flows:⁵¹² the United States has not ratified UNCLOS at all for reasons described in Section V, and the PRC lacks a provision to incorporate international agreements into domestic law, seemingly flouting UNCLOS despite having ratified it by adopting controversial and widely-criticized legal positions

⁵⁰⁹ Mika Aaltola, Juha Käpylä, and Valtteri Vuorisalo, *The Challenge of Global Commons and Flows for US Power: The Perils of Missing the Human Domain*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 2.

⁵¹⁰ Carla P. Freeman, "The Fragile Global Commons in a World in Transition," *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 36, no. 1 (2016), 17-28, 19, <http://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2016.0005>.

⁵¹¹ Mika Aaltola, Juha Käpylä, and Valtteri Vuorisalo, *The Challenge of Global Commons and Flows for US Power: The Perils of Missing the Human Domain*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 107.

⁵¹² Mika Aaltola et al., "Towards the Geopolitics of Flows: Implications for Finland," *The Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, June 9, 2014, 93, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/180917/FIIA_Report_40_web.pdf.

to assert that UNCLOS has no bearing on some of its maritime disputes.⁵¹³ Still, the USG's demonstrated interest is to maintain dominance along Asia's decisive terrain by maintaining a robust array of regional allies and partners in part through the provision of public goods, such as by protecting free maritime transit in the region.⁵¹⁴ By contrast, the PRC's interpretation of international law are distinctly at odds with that of nearly all UNCLOS ratifiers and of the United States; Carla Freeman's research shows that Beijing adopts a "situational" approach to high seas governance, whereby PRC policy toward an international agreement "depend upon Beijing's assessment of how a given regime relates to its national goals and ambitions."⁵¹⁵ The CCP has demonstrated clear resolve in its opportunistic approach to maritime behavior, and strategic MSRI investments building Chinese commercial and latent military power along maritime chokepoints and key SLOCs increase the achievable range of the CCP's opportunism.

Naval Power

The most obvious indicator of CCP maritime transformation is the development of the PLA Navy. A regime's navy is its most direct tool for exerting sea power, and Mahan observed

⁵¹³ On PRC nonincorporation of international agreements into domestic law, see Carla P. Freeman, "An Uncommon Approach to the Global Commons: Interpreting China's Divergent Positions on Maritime and Outer Space Governance," *The China Quarterly* 241, March 2020, 1-21, 6, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000730>. On the PRC's involved legal interpretations of UNCLOS to limit international regulation over its maritime disputes, see Isaac B. Kardon, "China Can Say 'No': Analyzing China's Rejection of the South China Sea Arbitration," *University of Pennsylvania Asian Law Review* 13, iss. 2 (2018), 1-46, <https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/alr/vol13/iss2/1/>; Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Views on the South China Sea Arbitration Case between the People's Republic of China and the Philippines," *China Leadership Monitor* 51, <https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/clm51ms.pdf>.

⁵¹⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for a 21st Century Defense*, January 3, 2012, 3, https://archive.defense.gov/news/defense_strategic_guidance.pdf; U.S. Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019, 2, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>; U.S. Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision*, November 3, 2019, 23, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>; U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, 2018, 9, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>; U.S. White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 18, 2017, 41, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

⁵¹⁵ Carla P. Freeman, "An Uncommon Approach to the Global Commons: Interpreting China's Divergent Positions on Maritime and Outer Space Governance," *The China Quarterly* 241, March 2020, 1-21, 17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000730>.

that “the history of sea power...is largely a military history.”⁵¹⁶ This is not to equate sea power or naval power strictly to warfighting. As Ken Booth’s framework details, navies have military, diplomatic, and constabulary functions across wartime and peacetime. Under this framework, a navy uses the “currency” of “actual or latent violence” by threatening or using force to military ends, such as by changing the balance of power in a theater with its presence,⁵¹⁷ to lend a hard edge to the regime’s broader policy.⁵¹⁸ This currency of emergent or latent naval violence assists in achieving the regime’s diplomatic objectives by reassuring allies and partners while threatening adversaries, with the navy’s margin of military superiority positively correlated to its regime’s credibility with states it would assure against other threats.⁵¹⁹ As the U.S. margin of military superiority diminishes, so too does U.S. strategic influence as doubts about the United States’ ability to deter and defeat shared adversaries proliferate allied capitals.⁵²⁰

The erosion of the U.S. Navy’s overmatching capacity and capability is deleterious to U.S. strategic influence and maritime peace. Sara Mitchell’s research uses the Issue Correlates of War dataset to find that “states with greater naval capabilities make more claims to offshore maritime areas and employ more coercive strategies unless they face countries with similar naval strength.”⁵²¹ Mitchell’s research showed that U.S. naval power, measured in terms of U.S.

⁵¹⁶ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, (1890; reprint, New York: Dover, 1987), 82.

⁵¹⁷ During peacetime, the leading way a navy uses this currency is by conducting presence operations. Naval presence can carry the flags and weaponry of a sovereign state far from its borders to signal a threatening or reassuring commitment in an overseas theater. See Henry J. Hendrix, *To Provide and Maintain: Why Naval Primacy is America’s First Best Strategy*, (Annapolis, Foscleville: 2020), xvii-xix.

⁵¹⁸ Ken Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 16. Booth’s framework is particularly applicable to U.S. “gunboat diplomacy” during the Cold War, wherein the visible deployment of a navy threatened but did not by itself constitute the use of force, thus shaping an adversary’s strategic decision making without initiating armed conflict. Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 282-284.

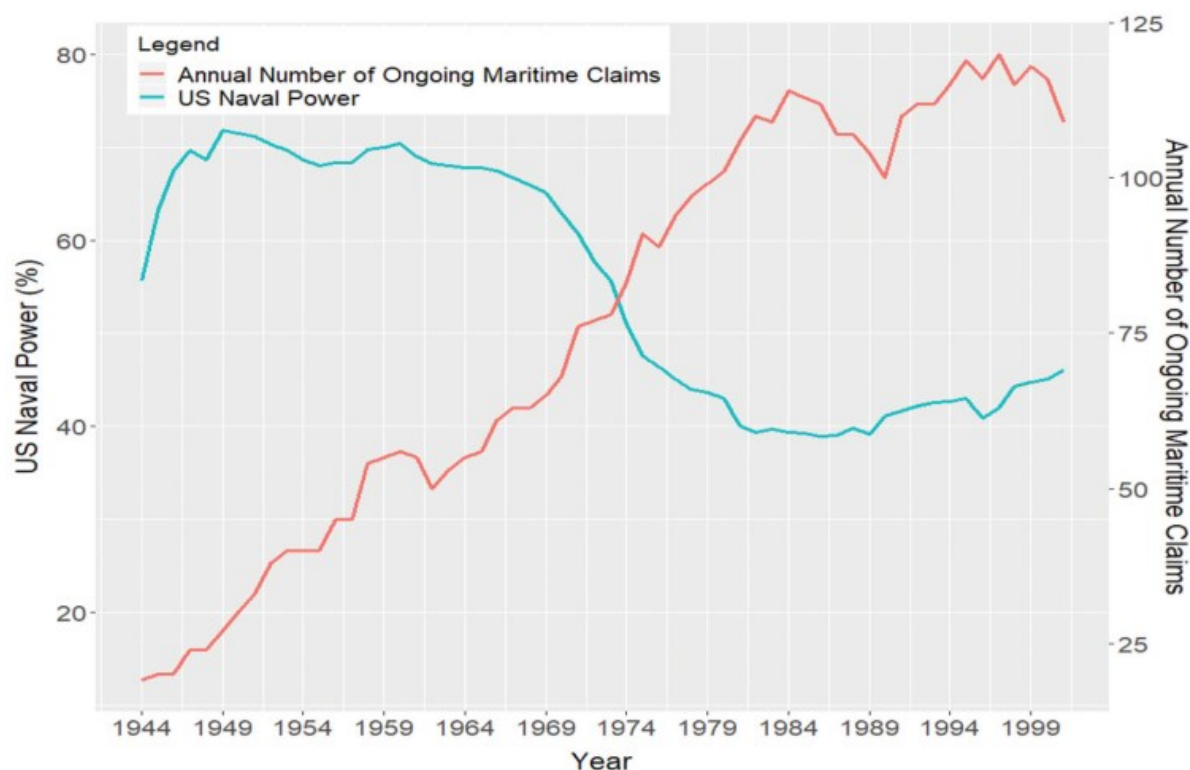
⁵¹⁹ Ken Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 18. On military superiority and credibility to allies and partners, see Glenn Snyder’s discussion of reputational values, wherein a state’s security guarantee turns also on its capability to deliver on this guarantee. Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 23-30.

⁵²⁰ Commission on the National Defense Strategy for the United States, “Providing for the Common Defense: The Assessment and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission,” November 2018, 1, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/providing-for-the-common-defense.pdf>.

⁵²¹ Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, “Clashes at Sea: Explaining the Onset, Militarization, and Resolution of Diplomatic Maritime Claims,” *Security Studies* 29, no. 4, 637-670, 639, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1811458>.

naval tonnage as a proportion of world naval tonnage, is inversely correlated with the number of maritime claims⁵²² worldwide.⁵²³ The implication is clear: while it lasted, global U.S. naval overmatch was an important contribution to global maritime stability.

Figure 10: U.S. Proportion of Global Naval Tonnage and Number of Ongoing Maritime Claims



Source: Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, “Clashes at Sea: Explaining the Onset, Militarization, and Resolution of Diplomatic Maritime Claims,” *Security Studies* 29, no. 4, 637-670, 655, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1811458>.

In this way, developing PLAN capabilities challenge U.S. strategic influence. The CCP’s pursuit of a world-class military has peacetime implications which threaten U.S. interests regardless of any actual outbreak of armed conflict. This section overviews trends and

⁵²² Mitchell defines a maritime claim as “a diplomatic conflict that involves explicit contention between two or more states over the ownership, access to, or usage of a maritime area.” Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, “Clashes at Sea: Explaining the Onset, Militarization, and Resolution of Diplomatic Maritime Claims,” *Security Studies* 29, no. 4, 637-670, 644-645, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1811458>.

⁵²³ Mitchell specified that power is not fungible across domains. Traditional measures of capabilities such as economic and demographic power have “no effect” in maritime claims despite being generally successful in resolving territorial disputes. By contrast, naval preponderance is significant in naval disputes but not territorial disputes. Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, “Clashes at Sea,” (presentation, Webinar: Sino-American Maritime Competition, The Hague Center for Strategic Studies, November 16, 2020), <https://youtu.be/XIXbz5oW26U?t=1713>.

asymmetries in the observable hardware—the tons, guns, and naval aviation—pertinent to the USG-CCP naval balance.

Trend: PLAN Modernization: More Hulls, Better Missiles

Ongoing PLA modernization is eroding U.S. naval primacy in the Indo-Pacific by shrinking the gap in capabilities, where the U.S. continues to lead, and growing the gap in force size, where the PLAN has overtaken the U.S. Navy. PLAN modernization involves a buildup which is overtaking the U.S. Navy by hulls and displacement. As of December 2020, DOD estimates the PLAN to operate a naval battle force⁵²⁴ of approximately 360 ships compared to the U.S. Navy's battle force of 297.⁵²⁵ The Office of Naval Intelligence anticipates that the PLAN battle force will grow to 425 vessels by 2030, adding approximately 55 surface combatants and 10 submarines over the next ten years.⁵²⁶ The PLAN's warship preponderance is sharpened by disparity in U.S. Navy and PLAN operational theaters; although the PLAN endeavors for extra-regional, possibly global power projection, its core operations remain within the First Island Chain, while the Indo-Pacific is only a priority theater within a global area of responsibility for the U.S. Navy.⁵²⁷ While nearly all of the PLAN aside from forces based in Djibouti can be expected to be stationed in the Indo-Pacific, only a rough 60 percent of the U.S. Navy will be in the theater.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁴ The U.S. Navy defines battle force ships as “commissioned United States Ship (USS) warships capable of contributing to combat operations, or a United States Naval Ship that contributes directly to Navy warfighting or support missions.” U.S. Office of the Secretary of the Navy, “GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF NAVAL VESSELS AND BATTLE FORCE SHIP COUNTING PROCEDURES.” SECNAV INSTRUCTION 5030.8C, June 14, 2016, <https://www.nvr.navy.mil/5030.8C.pdf>.

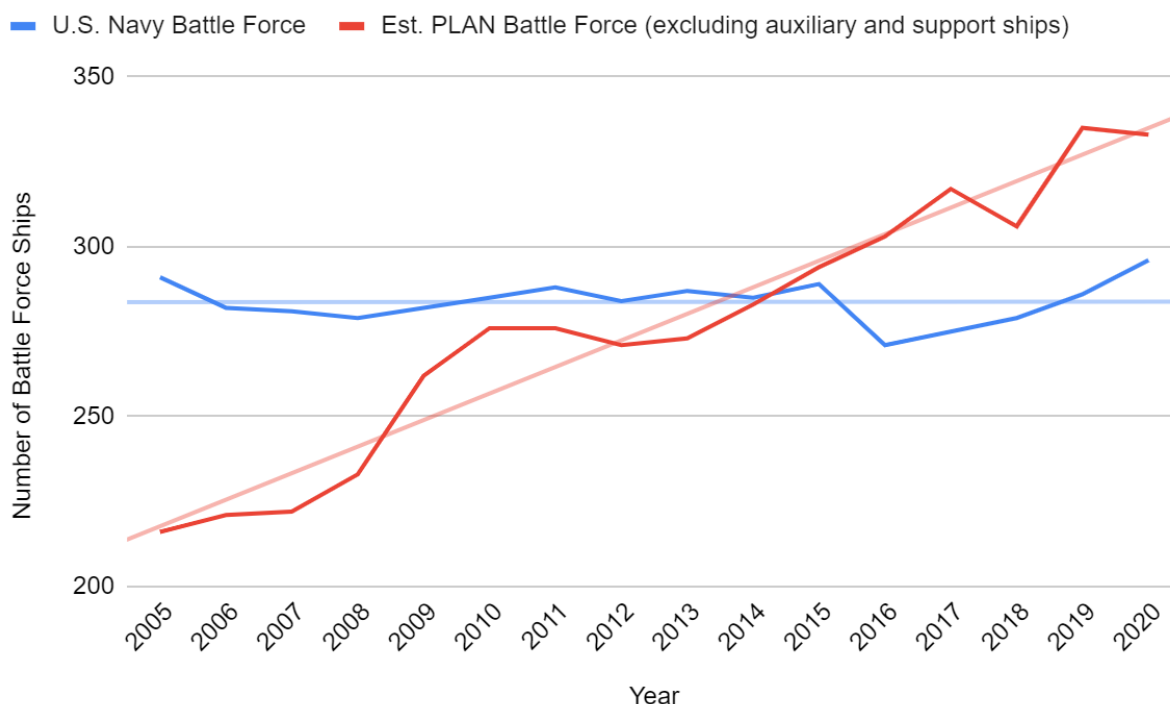
⁵²⁵ Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress* RL33153, Congressional Research Service, December 17, 2020, 32, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33153>; U.S. Navy, “Naval Vessel Register,” accessed December 26, 2020, <https://www.nvr.navy.mil/NVRSHIPS/SHIPBATTLEFORCE.HTML>.

⁵²⁶ U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence, “UPDATED China: Naval Construction Trends vis-à-vis U.S. Navy Shipbuilding Plans, 2020- 2030,” February 2, 2020, <https://fas.org/irp/agency/oni/plan-trends.pdf>.

⁵²⁷ Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), 208; U.S. Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019, cover letter, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

⁵²⁸ Sam LaGrone, “Work: Sixty Percent of U.S. Navy and Air Force Will Be Based in Pacific by 2020,” *USNI News*, September 30, 2014, <https://news.usni.org/2014/09/30/work-sixty-percent-u-s-navy-air-force-will-based-pacific-2020>;

Figure 11: Office of Naval Intelligence Estimates of U.S. Navy and PLAN Battle Force, 2005-2020



Source: Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress* RL33153, Congressional Research Service, December 17, 2020, 32, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33153>.

Nor can PLAN warships be discounted as low-quality platforms which would fare poorly in a high-intensity engagement with U.S. forces. As shown in Figure 12, Chinese naval shipbuilding by hulls and by full load displacement has consistently outpaced that of the U.S. Navy since 2011. Moreover, As shown in Figure 13, taking displacement as a crude metric for warship capabilities—and assuming that the density of combat power is approximate on modern warships—PLAN warships are comparable to those of the U.S. Navy.

These figures also show the PLAN's superior firepower dispersal; the tonnage of ships the U.S. Navy commissioned since 1999 is largely concentrated among its destroyers, and the service commissioned only a handful of corvette-styled littoral combat ships (LCS) over the past

U.S. Department of Defense, *Advantage at Sea: Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power*, December 2020, foreword, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Dec/17/2002553481/-1/-1/0/TRISERVICESTRATEGY.PDF/TRISERVICESTRATEGY.PDF>.

two decades.⁵²⁹ By contrast, half of the surface combatants the PLAN commissioned each year since 2013 have been corvettes, dispersing PLAN surface firepower across a greater number of smaller ships. A surface fleet dispersing its firepower across greater numbers of vessels diminishes the damage that each of an adversary's attacks' can do to the fleet's aggregate striking power, a clear benefit if an adversary has limited munitions and cannot simply target all ships indiscriminately.⁵³⁰ The U.S. battlefleet is heavily comprised of destroyers and cruisers equipped with the Aegis combat system⁵³¹ and are densely equipped with weaponry to fulfill multimission roles; the loss of a single ship would be, by design, a significant loss to the U.S. fleet's aggregate firepower.⁵³² The U.S. Navy has over the past decade discussed and begun adopting a Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO) concept to reverse this pattern, but reshaping the U.S. naval force structure will be a decades-long process; the U.S. Navy only awarded its first contract to build the first of a new class of guided missile frigates in 2020 as an experimental step toward distributing U.S. naval firepower and capability across a larger fleet of smaller ships.⁵³³

⁵²⁹ This pattern of procurement likely derives from U.S. naval inclinations developed as long ago as the Second World War, in which the U.S. Navy fought and won decisive naval battles using aircraft carriers as capital ships. Criticizing this perspective, U.S. Secretary of War Henry Stimson described "the peculiar psychology of the Navy Department, which frequently seemed to retire from the realm of logic into a dim religious world in which Neptune was god, Mahan his prophet, and the U.S. Navy the only true church." Thomas B. Buell, "Of Ships and the Men Who Sail Them," *Washington Post*, August 3, 1986, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/entertainment/books/1986/08/03/of-ships-and-the-men-who-sail-them/3090b6c8-5d75-42f2-b617-ff6c1f29a0a5/>; Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 266-267.

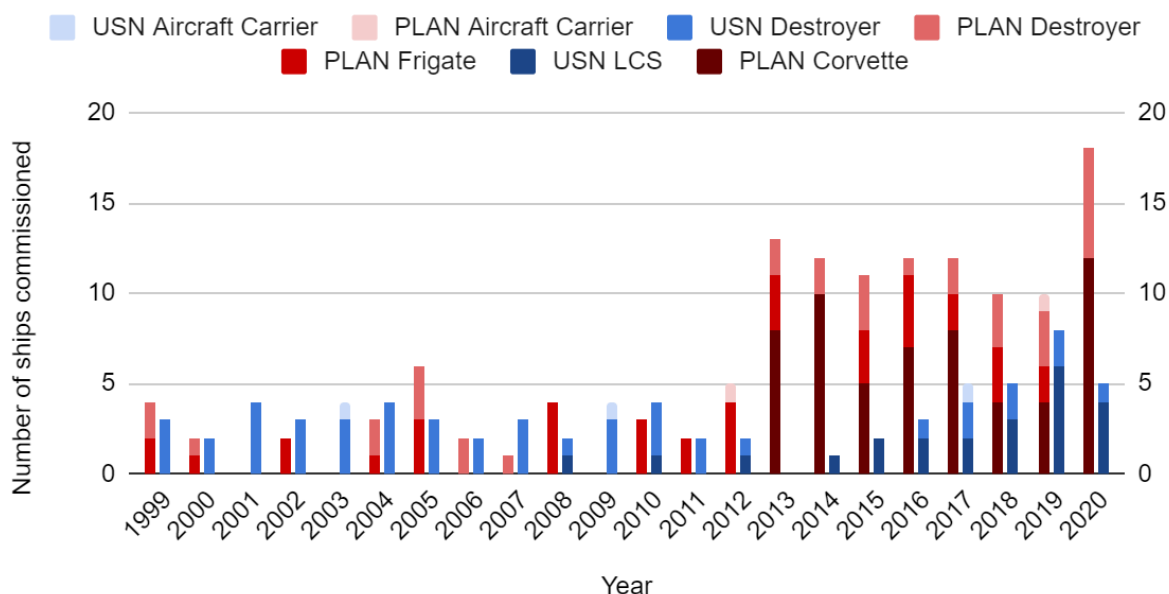
⁵³⁰ Thomas Rowden, Peter Gumataotao, and Peter Fanta, "Distributed Lethality," *Proceedings*, January 2015, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2015/january/distributed-lethality>; James Holmes, "Distributed Lethality: The Navy's Fix for Anti-Access?" *War on the Rocks*, January 19, 2015, <https://warontherocks.com/2015/01/distributed-lethality-the-navys-fix-for-anti-access/>.

⁵³¹ The Aegis combat system integrates radar, command and decision systems, and fire control systems to autonomously engage in air, surface, submarine, and land or maritime strike warfare simultaneously. U.S. Naval Sea Systems Command, "Aegis Combat System," accessed December 27, 2020, <https://www.navsea.navy.mil/Home/Warfare-Centers/NSWC-Port-Hueneme/What-We-Do/Aegis-Combat-System/>.

⁵³² Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* 2nd ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 236-237. U.S. fleet design as described here reflects Mahan's championing the concentration of offensive power as a fundamental principle of strategy, extending it to maritime strategy by casting the concentrated combat power of a battle fleet as the core of sea power. "In any frontier line, or any strategic front of operations, or any line of battle, offensive effort may, and therefore should, be concentrated in one part, not distributed along the whole." Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Mahan on Naval Warfare*, ed. Allan Westcott, (Mineola: Dover, 1999), 64. Also see David C. Gompert, *Sea Power and American Interests in the Western Pacific*, (Santa Clara: RAND Corporation, 2013), xi-xii.

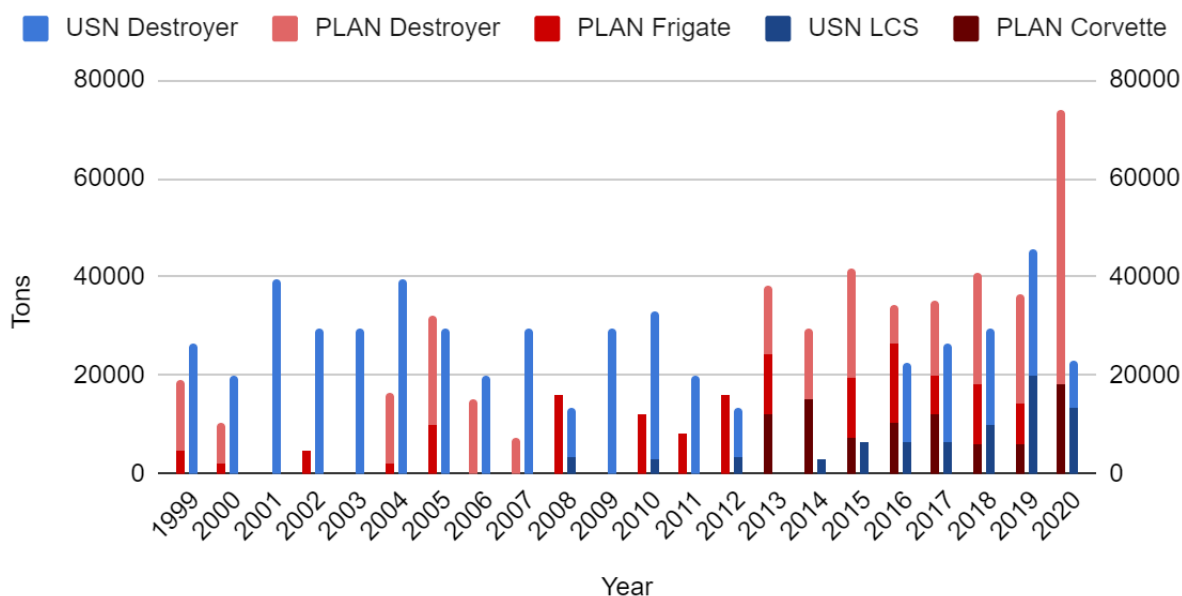
⁵³³ U.S. Navy, "A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority, Version 2.0," December 2018, 8, https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/18/2002301999/-1/-1/1/DESIGN_2.0.PDF; Kevin Eyer and Steve McJessey,

Figure 12: U.S. Navy and PLAN Surface Combatants and Aircraft Carriers Commissioned, 1999-2020



Source: Jane's Fighting Ships, accessed December 10, 2020.

Figure 13: Full Load Displacement of U.S. Navy and PLAN Surface Combatants Commissioned, 1999-2020



Source: Jane's Fighting Ships, accessed December 10, 2020.

"Operationalizing Distributed Maritime Operations," *Center for International Maritime Security*, March 5, 2019, <http://cimsec.org/operationalizing-distributed-maritime-operations/39831>; Megan Eckstein, "Fincantieri Wins \$795M Contract for Navy Frigate Program," *USNI News*, April 30, 2020, <https://news.usni.org/2020/04/30/fincantieri-wins-795m-contract-for-navy-frigate-program>.

A rough comparison of naval missile capacity and range also demonstrates PLAN warship competitiveness against U.S. Navy warships. The U.S. Navy's DDG-51 *Arleigh Burke*-class and DDG-1000 *Zumwalt*-class destroyers are equipped with 96-cell and 80-cell vertical launch systems (VLS) respectively.⁵³⁴ The PLAN's Type 052D and Type 055 guided missile destroyers have 64 and 112 cells, respectively.⁵³⁵ With these four warship classes, the U.S. Navy retains a preponderant advantage: the U.S. Navy's budget for Fiscal Year 2020 projects a total force of 68 DDG-51s and two DDG-1000s.⁵³⁶ As of the end of 2019, the PLAN has launched 23 Type 052Ds and 5 Type 055s.⁵³⁷ As the USG continues building DDG-51 *Arleigh Burkes* and the PLAN continues its run of Type 055s—to a total of at least 8 but rumored to grow to 24 within the next few years—the balance of total VLS capacity will shift toward the PLAN.⁵³⁸

The PLAN is likely to maintain if not expand its larger force size through its advantages in shipbuilding. DOD finds that the PRC “is the top ship-producing nation in the world by tonnage and is increasing its shipbuilding capacity and capability for all naval classes.”⁵³⁹ The

⁵³⁴ Congressional Research Service, *Navy DDG-51 and DDG-1000 Destroyer Programs: Background and Issues for Congress* RL32109, December 22, 2020, 6, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL32109>; U.S. Navy, “The US Navy Arleigh Burke Class Destroyer,” Accessed December 14, 2019, <https://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/Pages/Arleigh-Burke-Destroyer.aspx>.

⁵³⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, “Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020,” 2020, 46, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>; Daniel Caldwell, Joseph Freda, and Lyle J. Goldstein, “China Maritime Report No. 5: China's Dreadnought? The PLA Navy's Type 055 Cruiser and Its Implications for the Future Maritime Security Environment,” *China Maritime Studies Institute*, February 2020, 11, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/5>.

⁵³⁶ Congressional Research Service, *Navy DDG-51 and DDG-1000 Destroyer Programs: Background and Issues for Congress* RL32109, December 22, 2020, 1, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL32109>.

⁵³⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, “Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020,” 2020, 46, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

⁵³⁸ While VLS cells may not always carry surface strike missiles—they may hold SAMs, land attack cruise missiles (LACMs), or even be empty—greater VLS capacity does correspond to a diminished tradeoff in missile capacity and versatility when fulfilling a navy's missions. On the planned run of 8 Type 055 destroyers, see Daniel Caldwell, Joseph Freda, and Lyle J. Goldstein, “China Maritime Report No. 5: China's Dreadnought? The PLA Navy's Type 055 Cruiser and Its Implications for the Future Maritime Security Environment,” *China Maritime Studies Institute*, February 2020, 2, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-maritime-reports/5>. On rumors of the PLA potentially procuring an additional 16 Type 055 destroyers within the next five years, see Rick Joe, “Hints of Chinese Naval Procurement Plans in the 2020s,” *The Diplomat*, December 25, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/hints-of-chinese-naval-ambitions-in-the-2020s/>.

⁵³⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, “Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020,” 2020, vii, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

PRC backs its shipbuilders with direct financing and subsidies, expanding the industry fourfold between 2010 and 2019.⁵⁴⁰ State-owned enterprises, led by the dominant China Shipbuilding Group, conduct the majority of Chinese commercial and military shipbuilding,⁵⁴¹ and SOE dominance in both sectors supports the transfer of dual-use technologies through commercial channels to benefit PLA assets.⁵⁴²

The Chinese defense industrial base's shipbuilding capacity is a significant concern for U.S. military planners. First, the PLA defense industrial base's shipbuilding capacity indicates that PLAN force structure is all but certain to maintain if not grow its advantage in surface fleet size. As shown in Figure 14, USG analysis projects an ascendant PLAN force structure while the U.S. Navy directs its efforts toward changing its composition from large surface combatants to small surface combatants. A second concern for U.S. military planners is the PLAN's greater capacity for ship replacement in the event of a protracted conflict. Marine Commandant Gen. David Berger wrote that the difference between U.S. and PRC industrial bases, particularly in

CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF.

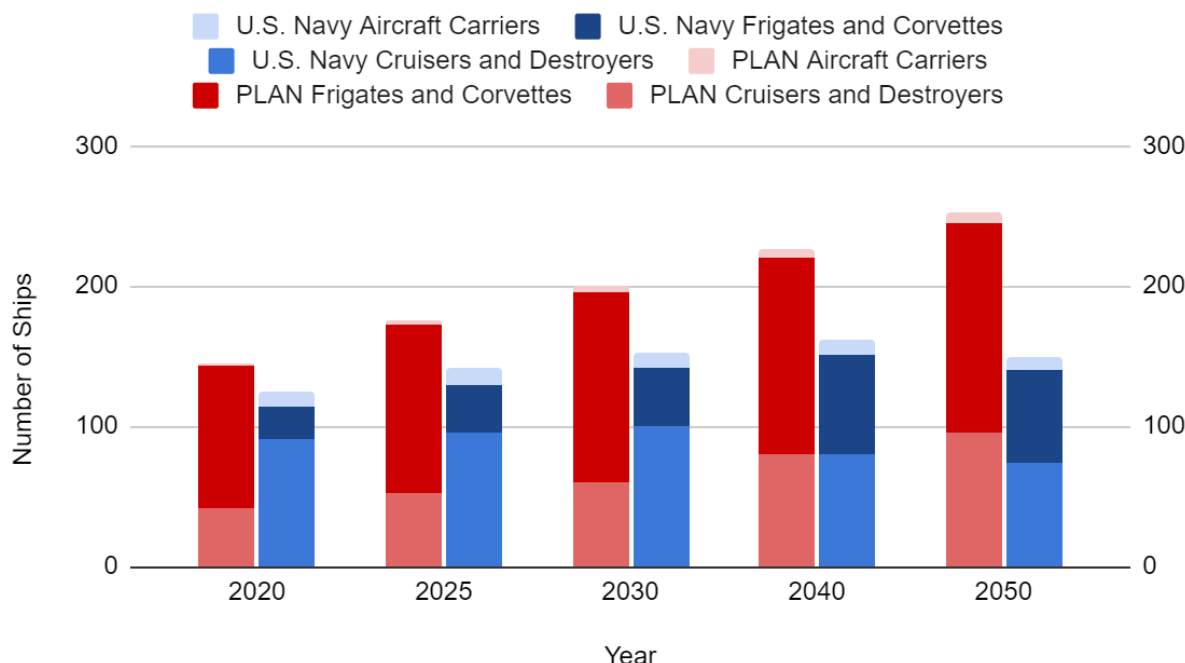
⁵⁴⁰ Jude Blanchette et al., "Hidden Harbors: China's State-backed Shipping Industry," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, July 2020, 1 & 7, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/207008_Blanchette_Hidden%20Harbors_Brief_WEB%20FINAL.pdf.

⁵⁴¹ While some analysts have argued that colocating military and civilian ship construction depresses productivity and efficiency in both and makes commercial clients "captive" to the needs of naval production, Chinese shipbuilders appear aware of the problem and to have taken steps to address them. The U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence finds that Chinese shipbuilders use a "semi-modular construction technique" that shortens vessel assembly times in order to preserve capacity at assembly ways and docks, which are needed for assembling both civilian and military vessels. This approach instead extends the time ships spend at outfitting piers and disproportionately impacts warships, which are outfitted with significantly more complex weapons and communications systems than commercial vessels, thus mitigating risks that military shipbuilding might disrupt delivery times for colocated civilian shipbuilding. On the potential dangers of colocating military and civilian shipbuilding, see Sue Hall and Audrye Wong, "Key Factors in Chinese Shipyards' Development and Performance: Commercial-Military Synergy and Divergence," in *Chinese Naval Shipbuilding: An Ambitious and Uncertain Course*, ed. Andrew S. Erickson, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2016), 103. On the ONI assessment of Chinese shipbuilders' semi-modular construction technique, see Office of Naval Intelligence, "UPDATED China: Naval Construction Trends vis-à-vis U.S. Navy Shipbuilding Plans, 2020- 2030," February 2, 2020, 4, <https://fas.org/irp/agency/oni/plan-trends.pdf>. For details on outfitting times for civilian and military vessels, see John Birkler et al., *Differences Between Military and Commercial Shipbuilding: Implications for the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2005), 30, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND_MG236.pdf.

⁵⁴² Andrew S. Erickson, "Chinese Naval Shipbuilding: Full Steam Ahead," *The Maritime Executive*, January 18, 2019, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/chinese-naval-shipbuilding-full-steam-ahead>; Sue Hall and Audrye Wong, "Key Factors in Chinese Shipyards' Development and Performance: Commercial-Military Synergy and Divergence," in *Chinese Naval Shipbuilding: An Ambitious and Uncertain Course*, ed. Andrew S. Erickson, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2016), 103.

shipbuilding capacity, will leave the United States “on the losing end of a production race—reversing the advantage we had in World War II when we last fought a peer competitor.”⁵⁴³

Figure 14: Projected U.S. Navy and PLAN Surface Fleets, 2020-2050



Source: various.⁵⁴⁴

Despite the PRC’s shipbuilding capacity, the PLA’s ability to maintain these vessels has not yet been tested at scale; the PLA’s defense industrial base had not needed to maintain a fleet at its current size and sophistication heretofore.⁵⁴⁵ Chinese state media indicates that environmental logistics such as managing corrosion on equipment at sea remains a challenge to be researched for the PLAN. For example, even following a 2018 research forum dedicated

⁵⁴³ Paul McLeary, “In War, Chinese Shipyards Could Outpace US in Replacing Losses; Marine Commandant,” June 17, 2020, <https://breakingdefense.com/2020/06/in-war-chinese-shipyards-can-outpace-us-in-replacing-losses/>.

⁵⁴⁴ Ronald O’Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress* RL33153, Congressional Research Service, December 17, 2020, 33, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33153>; U.S. Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, “Report to Congress on the Annual Long-Range Plan for Construction of Naval Vessels,” December 9, 2020, 6, https://media.defense.gov/2020/Dec/10/2002549918/-1/-1/0/SHIPBUILDING%20PLAN%20DEC%2020_NAVY_OSD_OMB_FINAL.PDF/SHIPBUILDING%20PLAN%20DEC%2020_NAVY_OSD_OMB_FINAL.PDF; U.S. Navy, “Naval Vessel Register,” accessed December 28, 2020, <https://www.nvr.navy.mil/NVRSHIPS/SHIPBATTLEFORCE.HTML>. Author estimates for PLAN force size in 2050.

⁵⁴⁵ Andrew S. Erickson, “Breaking Down the Pentagon’s 2020 China Military Power Report: A Quest for PLA Parity?” *The National Interest*, September 2, 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/breaking-down-pentagons-2020-china-military-power-report-quest-pla-parity-168201?page=0%2C1>.

to controlling corrosion on naval equipment and a comprehensive 2019 redesign of PLAN corrosion control policies, the PLA Naval Academy's research director Cao Jingyi [曹京宜] reported in 2020 that the PLAN strategy to combat corrosion remains a superficial and piecemeal effort which begins protecting equipment too late to be effective.⁵⁴⁶ Similarly, PLA engineers and analysts have found the storage and management of damage control equipment aboard warships to be "irrational": inadequate storage space leads to damage control equipment being strewn about the vessels, leak-plugging equipment are not updated or renewed to match vessel facility upgrades, and damage control procedures are not centrally coordinated.⁵⁴⁷ These shortcomings do not indicate a clear U.S. Navy advantage; the Navy's Board of Inspection and Survey's 2020 Annual Report evaluated U.S. Navy surface ships as "DEGRADED" in 11 of 21 functional areas, including key warfighting functions such as anti-submarine warfare, weapons systems, Aegis weapons systems, and aviation.⁵⁴⁸

More important for determining naval lethality is the PLAN's decisive missile advantage. Any kinetic conflict in the near seas will involve an asymmetry of forces, weighing the capabilities of the part of the U.S. Navy deployed to the Indo-Pacific against the PLAN, the CCP's paranaul forces, and the PLA's shore-based firepower.⁵⁴⁹ PLA naval modernization has included a decades-long effort to improve the precision, range, and versatility of the PLA's ship- and shore-launched missiles. Type 052D and 055 destroyers are equipped with HQ-9 surface-

⁵⁴⁶ Li Yun, "PLA naval deputy to NPC talks about technological innovation in equipment protection," *PLA Daily*, May 21, 2020, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-05/21/content_9818555.htm; Li Yun [黎云], "Cao Jingyi: Push for an Equipment 'Grand Strategy' and Develop Technological Innovation" [曹京宜:推动装备防护"大战略" 做好技术创新"细文章"], *PLA Daily*, May 21, 2020, http://www.chinamil.com.cn/jmywyl/2020-05/19/content_9816809.htm; *PLA Daily*, "The First Naval Equipment Corrosion Control and New Material Development Forum Is Held" [第一届海军装备腐蚀控制及新材料发展论坛举行], December 5, 2018, http://www.81.cn/hj/2018-12/05/content_9368248.htm.

⁵⁴⁷ Deng Kaiyong [邓开勇], Yin Hui [尹辉], and Shu Xiong [舒雄], "Problems with Managing the Use of Warship Damage Control Equipment and Suggestions for Optimization" [舰艇损管器材使用管理存在问题及优化建议], *China Ship Repair* [中国修船] 2, (April 2017), 23-25.

⁵⁴⁸ U.S. Navy Board of Inspection and Survey, INSURV Annual Report, March 1, 2021, 5, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Mar/03/2002592279/-1/-1/0/2020-INSURV-ANNUAL-REPORT.PDF/2020-INSURV-ANNUAL-REPORT.PDF>.

⁵⁴⁹ Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* 2nd ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 152.

to-air missiles (SAM) with an operational range equivalent to the U.S. Navy's currently deployed SM-2 SAM; protected from aerial assault behind the HQ-9's threat envelope, PLAN 052D and 055 destroyers can use the YJ-18 anti-ship cruise missile (ASCM), which boasts an operational range of 290 nautical miles, dramatically beyond the U.S. equivalent Harpoon's 70nm range.⁵⁵⁰

The navies' ASCM gap will persist for years: the Office of Naval Intelligence first confirmed in 2015 that the YJ-18 ASCM entered service with the PLAN, while as of 2020, U.S. long-range options have a shorter reach or remain in testing stages.⁵⁵¹ The much-trumpeted naval strike missile is only estimated to range above 100nm.⁵⁵² The still-developing SM-6 missile, which is marketed as capable across anti-air, anti-surface, and ballistic-missile missions, has a projected upper operation range of 200nm, still leaving a 90nm ASCM missile gap against a YJ-18.⁵⁵³ The Lockheed Martin long-range anti-ship missile (LRASM) similarly has a 200nm range; worse, the U.S. armed forces have only ordered 121 LRASMs across three procurements, accumulating only enough missiles to use against high-priority targets.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵⁰ Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy 2nd ed.*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 160-161; Missile Defense Project, "YJ-18," Missile Threat, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 25, 2020, last modified June 25, 2020, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/yj-18/>; Missile Defense Project, "Harpoon," Missile Threat, Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 5, 2017, last modified June 23, 2020, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/harpoon/>.

⁵⁵¹ U.S. Navy Office of Naval Intelligence, "The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21st Century," December 2, 2015, 16, https://www.oni.navy.mil/Portals/12/Intel%20agencies/China_Media/2015_PLA_NAVY_PUB_Print.pdf?ver=2015-12-02-081247-687; Missile Defense Project, "YJ-18," Missile Threat, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 25, 2020, last modified June 25, 2020, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/yj-18/>; David Lague, "Special Report: U.S. rearms to nullify China's missile supremacy," May 6, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-missiles-specialreport-us/special-report-u-s-rearms-to-nullify-chinas-missile-supremacy-idUSKBN2211EQ>.

⁵⁵² Raytheon Missiles & Defense, "Naval Strike Missile," accessed December 26, 2020, <https://www.raytheonmissilesanddefense.com/capabilities/products/naval-strike-missile>; David B. Larter, "US Navy deploys new ship-killer missile to China's backyard," September 5, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2019/09/06/the-us-navy-just-deployed-its-new-ship-killer-missile-to-chinas-backyard/>.

⁵⁵³ Missile Defense Project, "Standard Missile-6 (SM-6)," Missile Threat, Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 14, 2016, last modified June 15, 2018, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/defsyst/sm-6/>; Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy 2nd ed.*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 160-161.

⁵⁵⁴ John Keller, "Lockheed Martin to build 48 more LRASM subsonic anti-ship missile systems to attack high-priority targets," *Military & Aerospace Electronics*, April 9, 2020, <https://www.militaryaerospace.com/sensors/article/14173709/antiship-missile-lrasm-subsonic>.

Raytheon's Block V Tomahawk promises the ability to strike surface ships at a range between 675nm and 1350nm.⁵⁵⁵ If successful, the Block V will reverse the ASCM gap until the PLA reveals a YJ-18 successor. The U.S. Navy first tested the Block V Tomahawk on November 30, 2020, and additional tests are likely before Raytheon is able to deliver the missiles to the Navy, scheduled for some time in 2021.⁵⁵⁶ Details remain unclear as to whether the initial run of Block V Tomahawks will have the 675nm to 1350nm operational range or whether that will be deferred until a future delivery of Block Va and Vb Tomahawks; the former includes an upgraded target seeker, while the latter features improved warhead penetration, but testing and delivery timelines for either remain unspecified.⁵⁵⁷

Asymmetry: Land-Based Sea Denial and the PLAN Fortress Fleet

As long as the conflict theater remains the Indo-Pacific, the PLA maintains a significant advantage in sustaining its missile gap against the U.S. armed forces in the form of land-based firepower. This includes both shore-based systems, such as the 270nm ranging YJ-62 and YJ-12B ASCMs, and ballistic missile systems that, with longer ranges, can be placed deeper inland behind PLA anti-air defenses.⁵⁵⁸ PLA land-based firepower is a means of sea denial⁵⁵⁹ to contest

⁵⁵⁵ Missile Defense Project, "Tomahawk," Missile Threat, Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 19, 2016, last modified November 4, 2019, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/tomahawk/>; David B. Larter, "The US Navy has an upgraded Tomahawk: Here's 5 things you should know," *DefenseNews*, December 14, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2020/12/14/the-us-navy-has-an-upgraded-tomahawk-heres-5-things-you-should-know/>.

⁵⁵⁶ *NAVAIR News*, "Navy completes first Block V Tomahawk operational test launch," December 10, 2020, <https://www.navair.navy.mil/news/Navy-completes-first-Block-V-Tomahawk-operational-test-launch/Thu-12102020-1002>.

⁵⁵⁷ *NAVAIR News*, "Navy completes first Block V Tomahawk operational test launch," December 10, 2020, <https://www.navair.navy.mil/news/Navy-completes-first-Block-V-Tomahawk-operational-test-launch/Thu-12102020-1002>.

⁵⁵⁸ Gabriel Dominguez and Neil Gibson, "Image shows ground-launched variant of China's YJ-12 anti-ship missile," *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, November 8, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20181117051716/https://www.janes.com/article/84351/image-shows-ground-launched-variant-of-china-s-yj-12-anti-ship-missile>; *China Youth Daily*, "YJ-12B Coastal Defense Cruise Missile, Near Seas Defense 'Super Killer'" [鹰击-12B 岸舰导弹, 近海防御“超级杀手”], April 23, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2020-04/23/c_1210583132.htm;

⁵⁵⁹ Sea control and sea denial are informing opposites: sea control, what Mahan referred to as "command of the sea," refers to militarily creating a permissive maritime environment "where one's fleet would not face a serious opposition in executing other missions" in wartime. By contrast, sea denial is militarily contesting an adversary's sea control without securing sea control for oneself. See Milan Vego, *Maritime Strategy and Sea Control: Theory and Practice*, (London: Routledge, 2016), 21; Milan Vego, *Maritime Strategy and Sea Denial: Theory and Practice*, (London:

U.S. sea control in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. armed forces have historically enjoyed hegemonic control over global strategic geography, which allowed it to rapidly project military power across the global commons—notably oceans and the airspace above them—and wage war against adversaries anywhere in the world on short notice even without a local military presence.⁵⁶⁰ In a distant maritime theater such as the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. faces a disadvantage in the land it has available for basing fleets and placing firepower, while the PLA asymmetrically benefits from a greater ability to integrate land power and sea power.

U.S. naval theory prioritizes naval mobility in combat and cautions against compromising an erstwhile advantage by tethering themselves to fortifications on land or by engaging without decisive force any land-based opponents, which are typically capable of generating a rate of fire per unit, in a fixed geographic point.⁵⁶¹ Mahan himself derided the Russian Navy of 1905 as a “fortress fleet” adopting a “radically erroneous” approach to naval warfare for geographically circumscribing its mobility to the limits of its shore-based fire support.⁵⁶² The late Wayne Hughes, who taught naval warfare for more than thirty years at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, similarly observed that naval commanders “historically have sought to avoid having to fight in front of fortifications,” and modern naval officers should attempt to win a conflict “without having to confront the forts” or defeating them only “by finding an Achilles’ heel.”⁵⁶³ By contrast, PLA strategists describe “using the land to control the sea” [以陆制海] precisely to exploit the strategic benefits of augmenting a local navy with shore-based fire.⁵⁶⁴ As previously noted, this

Routledge, 2019), 104.

⁵⁶⁰ Barry R. Posen, “Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony,” *International Security* 28, iss. 1, (2006), 5-46, 8-9, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228803322427965>.

⁵⁶¹ Robert C. Rubel, “A Theory of Naval Airpower,” *Naval War College Review* 67, no. 3, (2014), 63-80, 65, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol67/iss3/6/>.

⁵⁶² James R. Holmes, “A ‘Fortress Fleet’ for China,” *The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* 11, no. 2, (2012), http://blogs.shu.edu/journalofdiplomacy/files/2012/05/009_Holmes_Layout-1a.pdf; Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China’s Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* 2nd ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 183.

⁵⁶³ Wayne P. Hughes Jr. and Robert P. Girrier, *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations* 3rd ed., (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 24-25.

⁵⁶⁴ English language analysis of this approach typically terms it anti-access/area denial (A2/AD). While the A2/AD approach is functionally identical to what is herein described, A2/AD is not a phrase originating from or commonly

land-centric framing of PLA strategy is endorsed by the PLA Academy of Military Sciences, whose 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* describes continental China as the “support and backstop” [本土为依托] from which power radiates to the “focal point” of the Indo-Pacific [两样地区为重点].⁵⁶⁵

Given technological advances, notably increased range and precision allowing ballistic missiles to strike targets thousands of nautical miles out at sea, Mahan’s criticism—and by extension, U.S. naval theory—appears outdated.⁵⁶⁶ The PLA’s DF-class ballistic missiles⁵⁶⁷ and the strategic depth they confer preserve PLAN mobility by extending a broad threat envelope thousands of nautical miles beyond China’s shores. Chinese media has been explicit about the

found in Chinese analysis, so this thesis refers instead to the terms and concepts which do appear in PLA literature. On PLA references to using land to control the sea, see Andrew S. Erickson, *Chinese Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile (ASBM) Development: Drivers, Trajectories and Strategic Implications*, (Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2013), 47, http://www.andrewerickson.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Chinese-Anti-Ship-Ballistic-Missile-Development_Book_Jamestown_2013.pdf; Andrew S. Erickson and David D. Yang, “Using the Land to Control the Sea?—Chinese Analysts Consider the Antiship Ballistic Missile,” *Naval War College Review* 62, 4, (2009), 53-86, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol62/iss4/6>.

⁵⁶⁵ Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), 246.

⁵⁶⁶ Modern sea power theorist Toshi Yoshihara sympathetically cites Chinese scholars who echo Mahan’s criticism of integrated approaches such as the Chinese composite of land and sea power on the basis that force should be concentrated, and by choosing to dedicate resources toward multiple orientations, “composite land-sea powers cannot be very strong in the maritime and continental directions simultaneously over the long term.” This criticism is perhaps overreaching and not altogether germane to the CCP’s strategic environment, defined by secure land borders, or approach to land-sea integrated planning. It remains to be seen whether and how CCP maritime strategy will change over the long term but, given enduring CCP assessments that the U.S. is not facing imminent collapse, the CCP is well-situated for the short and medium term by pursuing a sea denial strategy from a position of weakness or near-parity against the U.S. Navy rather than attempting to achieve maritime hegemony in the region by asserting Mahanian sea control, for which force concentration is a requirement. Further, the criticism that a composite land-sea approach necessitates multiple strategic orientations facing viable threats from each supposes an approach that uses continental forces to protect continental interests from continental threats rather than the PLA approach of “using land to control the sea,” which uses continental forces to protect maritime interests from maritime threats. See Toshi Yoshihara and Jack Bianchi, “Seizing on Weakness: Allied Strategy for Competing with China’s Globalizing Military,” *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*, January 4, 2021, 37, [https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA8239_\(Seizing_on_Weakness_Report\)_Web.pdf](https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA8239_(Seizing_on_Weakness_Report)_Web.pdf); Toshi Yoshihara, “China as a Composite Land-Sea Power: A Geostrategic Concept Revisited,” *Center for International Maritime Security*, January 6, 2021, <http://cimsec.org/china-as-a-composite-land-sea-power-a-geostrategic-concept-revisited/47156>.

⁵⁶⁷ DF-class ballistic missiles include short range ballistic missiles (SRBM), medium range ballistic missiles (MRBM), intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBM), and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM). SRBMs travel less than 1,000km or 540nm; MRBMs travel between 1,000km and 3,000km, or between 540nm and 1620nm; IRBMs travel between 3,000km and 5,500km, or between 1620nm and 2700nm; ICBMs have operational ranges beyond IRBMs. See Arms Control Association, “Worldwide Ballistic Missile Inventories,” updated December 2017, accessed December 26, 2020, [https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/missiles#:~:text=There%20are%20four%20general%20classifications,approximately%20620%2D1%2C860%20miles\)%3B](https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/missiles#:~:text=There%20are%20four%20general%20classifications,approximately%20620%2D1%2C860%20miles)%3B).

threat its land-based ballistic missiles pose to the United States; it referred to the DF-21D medium-range anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) as a “carrier killer” upon reveal in 2017 and similarly referred to its DF-26 intermediate-range ASBM variably as a “carrier killer” or a “Guam killer” missile, suggesting the missiles have the range and precision necessary to target U.S. military facilities on Guam or U.S. carrier strike groups.⁵⁶⁸ PLA analysts publish what Yoshihara and Holmes describe as a “real and intensifying interest in striking Aegis combatants at sea as a part of a broader anticarrier strategy,” for example in published research articles considering precisely how many and what sort of missile attacks would disable or sink an *Arleigh Burke* destroyer.⁵⁶⁹

The CCP appears keenly aware of the threat its shore-based ASBMs pose to the U.S. Navy: the PLARF fired DF-21D and DF-26 missiles into the South China Sea on August 26, 2020, which state-run media described as a gesture to deter U.S. military provocations along China’s periphery.⁵⁷⁰ Another report noted that the PLARF is expanding its DF-26 brigades and will likely position them where their extended reach can deter U.S. activities east of Guam while remaining far enough inland that the U.S. would be forced to resort to nuclear strikes to destroy the DF-26 launchers.⁵⁷¹ PLA and U.S. officers appear convinced of the PLARF’s ability to strike

⁵⁶⁸ *Xinhua*, “China Focus: PLA to celebrate 90th birthday with stronger, more peaceful military,” July 20, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-07/20/c_136458807.htm; Abhishek G Bhaya, “Chinese military launches DF-26 missiles dubbed as ‘Guam killer’,” *CGTN*, January 30, 2019, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d774d32637a4d32457a6333566d54/index.html>; Jordan Wilson, “China’s Expanding Ability to Conduct Conventional Missile Strikes on Guam,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, May 10, 2016, 1, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Staff%20Report_China's%20Expanding%20Ability%20to%20Conduct%20Conventional%20Missile%20Strikes%20on%20Guam.pdf.

⁵⁶⁹ Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China’s Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* 2nd ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 236-237.

⁵⁷⁰ Kristin Huang, “Exclusive | Chinese military fires ‘aircraft-carrier killer’ missile into South China Sea in ‘warning to the United States’,” *South China Morning Post*, August 26, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3098972/chinese-military-launches-two-missiles-south-china-sea-warning>; *Global Times*, “Hopefully, ‘carrier killer’ missiles would never be used in the South China Sea: Global Times editorial,” August 28, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1199208.shtml>.

⁵⁷¹ “如果东风-26 导弹部署在东部战区优势火力区域，那么足以威慑关岛以东的，从圣迭戈基地出发，增援东北亚地区的航母战斗群...对于当前的局势来讲，东风-26 完全没必要部署在沿海，发挥 4000 公里的优势，而是部署在腹地省份，打击距离我国境外 2000 公里外的目标。这种情况下，美军需要出动大打核大战用的武器和体系，才能有效摧毁部分东-26 发射车。” *The Paper* [澎湃新闻], “Americans: How Will You Use ‘DF’ to Strike Aircraft Carriers? China’s Response: By Extending Its Range to 4000” [美国人：你怎么用“东风”打航母？中国的回应：把射程加到 4000]，

vessels at extended ranges: retired senior colonel Wang Xiangsui [王湘穗] reportedly said that the August 2020 ASBM tests successfully hit a moving ship.⁵⁷² In November 2020, Commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command ADM Phil Davidson suggests that the PLA's so-called "carrier killer" missiles are misleadingly nicknamed because, rather than targeting a specific type of vessel, "they're targeting everything."⁵⁷³ The PLARF has not rested easy on its existing anti-ship capabilities and is likely pairing ongoing expansions in PLARF capacity with more advanced missiles able to strike ships still further out from Guam.⁵⁷⁴

In addition to range and precision, the PLARF has the ballistic missile capacity to protect its fortress fleet. In 2020, DOD reported that the PLARF fields 150 MRBM launchers and 200 IRBM launchers,⁵⁷⁵ the standard IRBM launcher is expected to have 0-1 reloads, while a standard MRBM launcher may have 0-2 reloads, indicating the PLARF has the capacity to

August 30, 2020, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_8957886.

⁵⁷² Kristin Huang, "China's 'aircraft-carrier killer' missiles successfully hit target ship in South China Sea, PLA insider reveals," *South China Morning Post*, November 14, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3109809/chinas-aircraft-carrier-killer-missiles-successfully-hit-target>; Joseph Trevithick, "Chinese Long-Range Ballistic Missiles Struck Moving Ship In South China Sea: Report," *The Drive*, November 16, 2020, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/37662/chinese-long-range-ballistic-missiles-struck-moving-ship-in-south-china-sea-report>.

⁵⁷³ Yasmin Tadjeh, "HALIFAX FORUM NEWS: China's New Rockets Called Asymmetric Threat to U.S. Navy," *National Defense*, November 21, 2020, <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2020/11/21/halifax-forum-news-china-accelerating-rocket-force-capability>.

⁵⁷⁴ Hans Kristensen, "China's Expanding Missile Training Area: More Silos, Tunnels, and Support Facilities," *Federation of American Scientists*, February 24, 2021, <https://fas.org/blogs/security/2021/02/plarf-jilantai-expansion/>; P.W. Singer and Ma Xiu, "China's missile force is growing at an unprecedented rate," *Popular Science*, February 5, 2020, <https://www.popsci.com/story/blog-eastern-arsenal/china-missile-force-growing/>.

⁵⁷⁵ DOD's public accounting that the PLARF has 200 IRBM launchers as of 2020 likely indicates a USG decision to publicly reveal previously classified details rather than an enormous newfound capacity in the PLA defense industrial base. DOD's 2019 report on PLA capabilities only noted 80 IRBM and 150 MRBM launchers. DF-26 launcher companies include several support vehicles: a Dongfeng EQ2050 armored vehicle, one to three support cargo trucks, one launch control vehicle, and a company or brigade command vehicle—as well as new PLARF brigades, each able to support 18 launchers. A leap from 80 to 200 IRBM launchers thus represents approximately 600 to 840 new vehicles and seven new brigades in need of basing, tripling PLARF capacity within one year. The likelier explanation is that the more notable change between the 2019 and 2020 DOD reports is one of U.S. declassification, not PLA production. For the 2020 IRBM launcher figures, see U.S. Department of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020," 2020, 59, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>. For the 2019 IRBM launcher figures, see U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019," May 2, 2019, 117, https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/02/2002127082/-1/-1/1/2019_CHINA_MILITARY_POWER_REPORT.pdf. For figures on launcher company brigade and support vehicle requirements, see Decker Eveleth, "China Military Power Report PLARF Roundup," *A Boy and His Blog*, September 3, 2020, <https://www.aboyandhis.blog/post/china-military-power-report-plarf-roundup>; Decker Eveleth, "China's Mobile ICBM Brigades: The DF-31 and DF-41," *A Boy and His Blog*, July 2, 2020, <https://www.aboyandhis.blog/post/china-s-mobile-icbm-brigades-the-df-31-and-df-41>.

discharge between 350 and 850 ASBMs in short order.⁵⁷⁶ The PLARF's sheer ASBM capacity, able to allocate 1-3 ASBMs per ship in the U.S. Navy battle force at a low-end range of 540nm, diminishes the need to identify and prioritize targets in the event of a kinetic maritime conflict with negative implications for the U.S. Navy's DMO concept.

The PLA's pursuit and cultivation of a missile gap, driven by ship-launched ASCMs and shore-based ASBMs, constitutes an effective sea denial capability that contests the U.S. Navy's ability to exercise sea control in the Indo-Pacific.⁵⁷⁷ The erosion of U.S. primacy in the Indo-Pacific is certain to undermine U.S. security guarantees and otherwise affect U.S. strategic influence: navies accrue and exert influence by exhibiting warfighting capability and agreeable intentions, and the U.S. Navy must for the foreseeable future maintain U.S. influence in the Indo-Pacific under the shadow of PLARF conventional precision strikes.⁵⁷⁸ While influence cannot be precisely measured, a downward trajectory for U.S. influence corresponding to its military balance in the region is likely.

The USG is keenly aware of how the PLA's missile superiority has shifted the Indo-Pacific military balance. The DOD 2020 Tri-Service Maritime Strategy, guiding the United States' Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard in global maritime competition, clearly articulates that the CCP is actively working to diminish the U.S. margin of military superiority at sea—successfully so:

China has implemented a strategy and revisionist approach that aims at the heart of the United States' maritime power. It seeks to corrode international maritime governance, deny access to traditional logistical hubs, inhibit freedom of the seas, control use of key

⁵⁷⁶ U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020," 2020, 59, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>; Henry Boyd, 2019 Pentagon report: China's Rocket Force trajectory," *IJSS*, May 15, 2019, <https://www.ijss.org/blogs/military-balance/2019/05/pla-rocket-force-trajectory>.

⁵⁷⁷ Missile Defense Project, "DF-26 (Dong Feng-26)," Missile Threat, Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 8, 2018, last modified June 23, 2020, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/dong-feng-26-df-26/>; Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* 2nd ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 184.

⁵⁷⁸ Ken Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 28-29.

chokepoints, deter our engagement in regional disputes, and displace the United States as the preferred partner in countries around the world...

China's and Russia's aggressive naval growth and modernization are eroding U.S. military advantages. **Unchecked, these trends will leave the Naval Service unprepared to ensure our advantage at sea and protect national interests within the next decade.**⁵⁷⁹

A key pillar of DOD's response has been to seek new operational concepts to arrest this apparent decline.⁵⁸⁰ U.S. Naval strategy since the Cold War has attempted to use and sustain its dominant position of being able to assert local sea control anywhere in the world; sea control remained a U.S. Navy imperative as of the two maritime strategies preceding the 2020 Tri-Service Maritime Strategy.⁵⁸¹ The 2020 strategy settled on operational concepts combining "distributed fleet operations and mobile, expeditionary formations with sea control and sea denial capabilities" by making use of both "sea-based and land-based fires" to mass combat power despite an adversary's missile threat envelope.⁵⁸² Said differently, the U.S. is shifting from operational concepts informed by traditional Mahanian sea power to instead "using the land to control the sea."⁵⁸³

⁵⁷⁹ Emphasis in original. U.S. Department of Defense, *Advantage at Sea: Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power*, December 2020, 3 & 5, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Dec/17/2002553481/-1/-1/0/TRISERVICESTRATEGY.PDF/TRISERVICESTRATEGY.PDF>.

⁵⁸⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, 2018, 7, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

⁵⁸¹ Thomas A. Rowden, "Sea Control First," U.S. Navy, January 4, 2017, <https://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/Pages/Sea-Control-First.aspx>; Sebastian Bruns, *US Naval Strategy and National Security: The Evolution of American Maritime Power*, (London: Routledge, 2018), 131-132; U.S. Navy, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power*, October 2007, 13, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090227115427/http://www.navy.mil/maritime/MaritimeStrategy.pdf>; U.S. Navy, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power*, March 2015, 22-24, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200414101934/https://www.navy.mil/local/maritime/150227-CS21R-Final.pdf>.

⁵⁸² U.S. Department of Defense, *Advantage at Sea: Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power*, December 2020, 7, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Dec/17/2002553481/-1/-1/0/TRISERVICESTRATEGY.PDF/TRISERVICESTRATEGY.PDF>.

⁵⁸³ Confirming this assessment, U.S. doctrine is increasingly embracing the PLA model of land-based sea denial: the U.S. Marine Corps' latest force design document responds to the "impacts of proliferated precision long-range fires" by suggesting that Marines be equipped with the sensors and weapons "that can provide a landward complement to Navy capabilities," in which landward refers to the part of a littoral inland from the shore which can be supported and defended directly from the sea. DOD envisions the Marine Corps as a highly mobile force able to use long-range precision fire to exercise sea denial functions while maneuvering contested environments, following the model set forth by the PLA fortress fleet. See U.S. Marine Corps, *Force Design 2030*, March 2020, 4-5, <https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Docs/CMC38%20Force%20Design%202030%20Report%20Phase%20I%20and%20II.pdf?ver=2020-03-26-121328-460>; U.S. Marine Corps, *Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment*, 2017, 4, <https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/160/LOCE%20full%20size%20edition.pdf?ver=2018-06-20-095003->

By adopting a fortress fleet approach to sea denial and integrating its sea power with land-based assets, the PLA has successfully forced the U.S. sea forces to either adopt a land-sea integrated sea denial approach of its own along China's periphery or pull back from the theater altogether. Given that sea control is typically exercised by a dominant power against a weaker one, parity between the U.S. Navy and PLAN within the conflict theater will likely make sea denial rather than sea control the salient naval operation. Correspondingly, the PLAN's ability to seize and exert sea control in wartime within and beyond the Second Island Chain remains uncertain. The PLA's missile gap imposes significant costs on regional adversaries but does little to cultivate influence if for no other reason than diplomacy is more easily conducted with regular port visits, mil-mil contacts, and joint exercises than at the end of a missile.

Trend: Outgrowth of PLAN Aviation Toward Sea Control

The PLAN appears to be building the aviation capabilities needed to establish sea control along China's periphery. Even without a near-peer challenge, the PLAN surface fleet would not likely be able to achieve regional sea control without command of maritime airspace.⁵⁸⁴ PLAN aviation currently plays a limited role in the existing Indo-Pacific naval balance, with most of the naval air fleet being land-based. Ongoing PLAN operationalization of its first aircraft carriers, with plans for additional construction, is converting PLA naval aviation from a land-based force to an increasingly sea-based one, adding a new domain to the naval challenge facing U.S. forces in the Indo-Pacific.⁵⁸⁵

177.

⁵⁸⁴ Milan Vego, *Maritime Strategy and Sea Control: Theory and Practice*, (London: Routledge, 2016), 41. Airpower at sea first became a decisive part of sea control during the Second World War, as U.S. and UK navies were unable to reliably secure allied merchant convoys against German submarines when sailing through an "air gap" in the mid-Atlantic, where the convoy was without the limits of air cover from North America, Iceland, or the UK. These convoys were secured largely in part by aircraft carrier escorts able to patrol larger swaths of ocean while equipped with dedicated antisubmarine weapons. See Paul Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory: The Problem Solvers Who Turned the Tide in the Second World War*, (New York: Random House, 2013), 35 & 50-52.

⁵⁸⁵ China Aerospace Studies Institute, "PLA Aerospace Power: A Primer on Trends in China's Military Air, Space, and Missile Forces 2nd ed.," September 26, 2019, 35, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/Books/Primer_2nd_Edition_Web_2019-07-30.pdf?ver=2019-08-05-102017-503.

The PLAN carrier production schedule dictates when and how other PLAN aviation capabilities develop. As of 2020, the PLAN operates two ski jump carriers able to field a fighter force equivalent to an airborne brigade when operating in conjunction;⁵⁸⁶ DOD notes that the PLA expects a third carrier to enter service by 2023 and be operational by 2024.⁵⁸⁷ Though no official carrier production plans are publicly available, Chinese media has long published rumors that the PLAN aims to grow its fleet up to six carriers.⁵⁸⁸ The third carrier, currently in production, and all produced thereafter are reported to feature jet-launching catapults, and while the third carrier will likely be conventionally powered, some future carriers are likely to be nuclear-powered.⁵⁸⁹

The PLAN is modernizing its naval air fleet in anticipation of its coming carrier fleet. The current PLAN aviation force remains small, reflecting the extended production timelines of aircraft carriers: only 24 J-15 fixed-wing carrier aircraft are confirmed, and “approximately” that figure has been produced; the number of naval aviators present at a recent carrier commissioning ceremony appear to confirm the limited force size.⁵⁹⁰ A second reason the PLAN has maintained a comparatively small J-15 fleet is its planned carrier aircraft modernization. A modified variant of the multirole FC-31 stealth fighter, sometimes called the J-31, is likely to replace the J-15 as the PLAN’s primary carrier-deployed fixed-wing aircraft.⁵⁹¹ Although public

⁵⁸⁶ Ying Yu Ling, “How Will the Chinese Navy Use Its 2 Aircraft Carriers?” *The Diplomat*, January 10, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/how-will-the-chinese-navy-use-its-2-aircraft-carriers/>.

⁵⁸⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, “Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2020,” 2020, 44 & 47, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

⁵⁸⁸ *Global Times*, “PLA Navy to have at least 5 carriers: experts,” December 6, 2018, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-12/06/content_9369401.htm.

⁵⁸⁹ Minnie Chan and Guo Rui, “China will build 4 nuclear aircraft carriers in drive to catch US Navy, experts say” *South China Morning Post*, February 6, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/2185081/china-will-build-4-nuclear-aircraft-carriers-drive-catch-us-navy>.

⁵⁹⁰ *Reference News* [参考消息], “China Accelerates Research and Development for Many Types of Carrier-Based Aircraft, Retaining the Two-Seat J-15 Electronic Warfare Fighter Plane” [中国加速研发多种舰载机 含双座型歼-15 电子战机], January 23, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2018-01/23/c_129797248.htm; Minnie Chan, “China military’s new Shandong aircraft carrier set to have smaller fighter jet force than expected,” *South China Morning Post*, December 20, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3043042/smaller-fighter-jet-force-expected-chinas-new-aircraft-carrier>.

⁵⁹¹ *Global Times*, “Is China developing a new type of carrier-based aircraft? Expert: J-31 is expected to replace J-15” [中国正研制新型舰载机？专家：歼 31 有望取代歼 15], July 6, 2018,

indicators point to the FC-31 with significant confidence, some conflicting indicators continue to suggest that the comparatively heavier J-20 stealth fighter will also be deployed for carrier operations.⁵⁹² The PLAN does not appear to be preparing to operationalize the J-20 for carrier operations, however, given PLAAF dominance in J-20 production and the PLAN's preference for one multimission fighter tailored to PLAN missions, for which the J-20—designed for contesting air superiority with minimal ground attack capabilities—is only a partial fit.⁵⁹³

Either choice would be a significant improvement over the current carrier-operated J-15, an air superiority fighter modeled off the Russian Su-33. The J-15 is more heavily armed and has operational ranges and altitudes well beyond those of the U.S. F-18E and F-35 but is severely undercut by its incompatibility with catapult launch systems, which necessitate a lower fuel carriage and weapons payload for carrier takeoff.⁵⁹⁴ Notably, the J-15 only features stopgap means such as graphene coatings for radar evasion.⁵⁹⁵ Unlike the J-15, the FC-31⁵⁹⁶ is

<http://military.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0706/c1011-30131656.html>; Northern Morning News Military [北方晨报军事], "Chinese Aviation Industry Official Announces the Likely Next Generation Carrier-Based Fighter Will Resemble FC-31" [中国航空工业疑官宣下一代舰载战斗机 外形似 FC31], *Sina*, December 22, 2019, <https://mil.news.sina.com.cn/jssd/2019-12-22/doc-iihnzhfz7510975.shtml>; U.S. Department of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020," 2020, 50, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

⁵⁹² Rick Joe, "Beyond China's J-20 Stealth Fighter," *The Diplomat*, September 20, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/beyond-chinas-j-20-stealth-fighter/>; Minnie Chan, "China's navy 'set to pick J-20 stealth jets for its next generation carriers'," *South China Morning Post*, August 27, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3024584/chinas-navy-set-pick-j-20-stealth-jets-its-next-generation>.

⁵⁹³ "同时，歼-20 型战斗机作为一型专司夺取制空权的、只具备一定的对地攻击能力的第四代战斗机" *Sina* [新浪], "In addition to carrier-based variants for China's FC-31 fighter jet, variants focusing on ground and air operations are possible" [中国 FC31 战机除上舰外 海航陆基型和空军型都有可能], July 26, 2019, <https://mil.news.sina.com.cn/jssd/2019-07-26/doc-ihytcerm6375656.shtml>.

⁵⁹⁴ Abraham Ait, "Don't Underestimate China's Flying Shark," *The Diplomat*, November 17, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/dont-underestimate-chinas-flying-shark/>.

⁵⁹⁵ Minnie Chan, "Chinese warplanes to get new coatings to make them harder to detect," *South China Morning Post*, March 23, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3076335/chinese-warplanes-get-new-coatings-make-them-harder-detect>.

⁵⁹⁶ Whether the FC-31 will be a mass-produced dedicated platform for carrier aviation or another incremental step toward the plane PLA planners want remains unclear. Perhaps indicating the latter, Chinese aviation manufacturers are already looking beyond the FC-31. Chief Designer of the Chengdu Aircraft Design Institute Wang Haifeng [王海峰], who led work on the PLA's fifth-generation J-20, shared in a 2019 interview that the Institute has begun pre-research work on sixth generation aircraft, which should manifest into a weapon capable of securing air dominance and sea control by 2035. See Wang Haifeng [王海峰], "Mystery: the miracle of the J-20's super short development period solved" [揭开歼 20 超短研发周期实现首飞“奇迹”的奥秘], *Aviation Online* [航空制造网], January 3, 2019, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzU3Njg5ODgwMA==&mid=2247492348&idx=2&sn=ecafaeffb1bc01d16fbf7078f3a284a&source=41#wechat_redirect.

designed to be a multi-role fighter capable of air combat, ground assault, and routine air patrols.⁵⁹⁷ Other improvements include an electromagnetic aircraft launch system and improved intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) technology.⁵⁹⁸

Though current PLAN aviation mission sets remain immature, they appear inclined toward securing regional sea control. Official Chinese strategic guidance defines PLAN aviators' primary mission as protecting Chinese waters and maritime airspace through "offensive strike, air defense, maritime reconnaissance and patrol, anti-submarine warfare (ASW), and anti-surface warfare (ASuW)," with future mission sets likely to include blue water operations.⁵⁹⁹ While maritime strike and ISR have been the primary tasks for which PLAN aviation trained, since 2015, training operations have increasingly included surface fleet support and defensive counterair in realistic conflict conditions, developing capabilities needed to match Japanese or U.S. sea forces.⁶⁰⁰ This training has almost entirely originated from airfields, however, and how PLAN aviation training will adapt to carrier operations remains to be seen.

Developments in PLAN carriers and carrier aviation foster increased power projection capabilities, which would for the first time make the PLAN capable of enforcing an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) over large swaths of airspace over the South China Sea, which Chinese officials have repeatedly suggested is a likely, if yet-unenforceable, objective. In 2016, A PRC Ministry of National Defense spokesperson described the Chinese decision to enforce

⁵⁹⁷ China Youth Daily [中国青年报], "Whither the FC-31 'Falcon'?" [FC-31“鹞鹰”将走向何方], March 15, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2018-03/15/c_129830008.htm.

⁵⁹⁸ Nitin J Ticku, "China to Launch Another Stealth Fighter - Shenyang FC-31, While Anxious India Looks On," *The Eurasian Times*, March 17, 2020, <https://eurasianimes.com/china-to-launch-another-stealth-fighter-shenyang-fc-31-while-anxious-india-looks-on/>.

⁵⁹⁹ Ken Allen and Lyle Morris, "PLA Naval Aviation Training and Operations: Missions, Organizational Structure, and Training (2013-15)," China Aerospace Studies Institute, December 20, 2017, 3, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Research/PLAN_Aviation/PLA%20Naval%20Aviation%20Web%20PDF%20v2.pdf?ver=2017-12-20-093117-563.

⁶⁰⁰ China Aerospace Studies Institute, "PLA Aerospace Power: A Primer on Trends in China's Military Air, Space, and Missile Forces 2nd ed.," September 26, 2019, 41, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/Books/Primer_2nd_Edition_Web_2019-07-30.pdf?ver=2019-08-05-102017-503; Ken Allen and Lyle Morris, "PLA Naval Aviation Training and Operations: Missions, Organizational Structure, and Training (2013-15)," China Aerospace Studies Institute, December 20, 2017, 7-11, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Research/PLAN_Aviation/PLA%20Naval%20Aviation%20Web%20PDF%20v2.pdf?ver=2017-12-20-093117-563.

an ADIZ over the South China Sea as depending on “the threat that China faces in the air,” which spokespersons from Ministry of Foreign Affairs have since reiterated.⁶⁰¹

The PLAN currently lacks adequate infrastructure for enforcing a South China Sea ADIZ. Though the PLAN has access to its three increasingly-militarized artificial island bases in the South China Sea, each ostensibly able to base 24 aircraft, the harsh maritime environment of these bases are highly corrosive to stationed aircraft.⁶⁰² Radomes likely housing radar and communications equipment on the islands imply the PLA has meaningful maritime domain awareness and ISR capabilities over the South China Sea,⁶⁰³ but sailors stationed at these bases are not well-trained in their operation.⁶⁰⁴ Moreover, 45.1 percent of PLAN sailors stationed in the island base report symptoms of poor mental health, diminishing force readiness.⁶⁰⁵ Current PLAN basing in the South China Sea is inadequate to enforce an ADIZ.

These limitations would be largely resolved with carrier deployments. Mobile carriers can conduct patrols well beyond the limits of three island bases. Catapult-launched FC-31 are expected to have combat radiuses of 648nm using only internal fuel, comparable to the F-35C’s 670nm radius.⁶⁰⁶ While the FC-31 cannot match the F-35 in stealth or combat capabilities,

⁶⁰¹ Wu Qian [吴谦], PRC Ministry of Defense Regular Press Briefing, February 25, 2016, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Press/2016-02/25/content_4644801.htm; PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin at the Press Conference on the White Paper Titled China Adheres to the Position of Settling Through Negotiation the Relevant Disputes Between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea,” July 13, 2016, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1381980.shtml.

⁶⁰² Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, “Updated: China’s Big Three Near Completion,” June 29, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/chinas-big-three-near-completion/>; Michael Pilger, “ADIZ Update: Enforcement in the East China Sea, Prospects for the South China Sea, and Implications for the United States,” *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, March 2, 2016, 9, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/ADIZ%20Update_0.pdf.

⁶⁰³ For a detailed assessment of the maritime domain awareness platforms the PLA likely has in the South China Sea, see J. Michael Dahm, “Air and Surface Radar,” Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory South China Sea Military Capabilities Series, July 2020, https://www.jhuapl.edu/Content/documents/AirandSurfaceRadar_v2.pdf.

⁶⁰⁴ Alexander Neill, Meia Nouwens, and Laurence Taylor, “China’s radar installations in the Spratly Islands – what do they tell us about its ambitions for the South China Sea?” *IISS*, February 19, 2018, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2018/02/china-radar>.

⁶⁰⁵ Zi Yang, “Assessing Mental Health Challenges in the People’s Liberation Army, Part 2: Physical Operational Environments and Their Impacts on PLA Service Members,” *China Brief*, August 14, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/assessing-mental-health-challenges-in-the-peoples-liberation-army-part-2-physical-operational-environments-and-their-impacts-on-pla-service-members/>.

⁶⁰⁶ Jane’s All the World’s Aircraft: Development & Production, May 11, 2020; John M. Donnelly, “Navy’s Top-Dollar Stealth Fighter May Not Go the Distance,” *Roll Call*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.rollcall.com/2018/05/21/navys-top-dollar-stealth-fighter-may-not-go-the-distance/>.

PLAN aviation's strategic imperative in enforcing an ADIZ has as much of a peacetime component as a wartime one: enforcing an ADIZ is effectively enforcing sovereignty over disputed waters and territories, and no South China Sea territorial claimant features a navy or air force capable of engaging the PLAN.

Realizing these capabilities requires first overcoming problems in the PRC's aeroengine manufacturing program, which longtime intelligence analyst Lonnie Henley describes as an "ongoing disaster."⁶⁰⁷ PLA aeroengine manufacturers have yet to master several key components and technologies necessary for producing advanced jet fighters; foremost among them is the metallurgy of creating resilient turbine blades able to tolerate the high temperatures and pressure associated with an advanced jet engine.⁶⁰⁸ As a result, the PLA's jet engines do not produce the anticipated thrust and have been known to explode during tests.⁶⁰⁹

Asymmetry: CCP Paranaul Forces and Gray Zone Activities

In addition to a navy and its burgeoning aviation wing, the CCP employs two sea forces to assert its interests in China's near seas: the paranaul CCG and PAFMM. The CCG and PAFMM operate similarly to the PLAN but modify Booth's framework of navies having military, diplomatic, and constabulary functions by extending a military threat only as a proxy of the PLAN and eschewing diplomatic functions altogether. By filling the strategic space of China's near seas with paranaul forces and directing them to conduct gray zone operations (those that leverage nonmilitary tools to achieve competitive objectives through activities falling below the escalation threshold for open war), the CCP increases its ability to exercise sea control on

⁶⁰⁷ Lonnie Henley, "PLA Operational Concepts and Centers of Gravity in a Taiwan Conflict," written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on *Deterring PRC Aggression Toward Taiwan*, February 18, 2021, 3, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2021-02/Lonnie_Henley_Testimony.pdf.

⁶⁰⁸ Peter Wood, Alden Wahlstrom, and Roger Cliff, "China's Aeroengine Industry," *China Aerospace Studies Institute*, April 22, 2020, 28-29, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Research/Infrastructure/CASI_Aeroengines%20041520.pdf?ver=2020-04-22-133912-480.

⁶⁰⁹ Kyle Mizokami, "China's Super Fighter Comes Online — With Inferior Engines," *Popular Mechanics*, February 13, 2018, <https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/aviation/a17763845/chinas-super-fighter-comes-online-with-inferior-engines/>.

China's maritime periphery against Southeast Asian countries while mitigating the likelihood of an adversary's military response.⁶¹⁰ In this way, the CCP's paranaul forces have effectively introduced a new threat to Southeast Asian countries against which U.S. security guarantees have been largely ineffective.

The CCP deploys its paranaul services in constabulary roles to assert CCP sovereignty in China's near seas, maintaining administrative presence and taking coercive action against U.S. allies and partners to great effect.⁶¹¹ The anatomy of threat is simple and involves each service: the PAFMM initiates with aggressive maneuvers but "no force," followed by CCG vessels "to demonstrate state commitment and add nonlethal coercion if necessary," backed by the threat of the PLAN looming over the horizon.⁶¹² With these and similar tactics, the CCP has: maintained a constant paranaul presence around disputed features in the South China Sea;⁶¹³ harassed the vessels and platforms of neighboring countries attempting to extract energy resources;⁶¹⁴ intimidated neighboring countries attempting to construct facilities on features in

⁶¹⁰ On Booth's framework for navies' functional impact, see Ken Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 16. On defining gray zone operations, see Michael J. Mazarr, "Struggle in the Gray Zone and World Order," *War on the Rocks*, December 22, 2015, <https://warontherocks.com/2015/12/struggle-in-the-gray-zone-and-world-order/>. On approaching sea control while avoiding a military conflict, see Peter A. Dutton, "Conceptualizing China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations," in *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 31.

⁶¹¹ Ryan D. Martinson, "Militarizing Coast Guard Operations in the Maritime Gray Zone," in *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 93.

⁶¹² Peter A. Dutton, "Conceptualizing China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations," in *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 34.

⁶¹³ Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "Signaling Sovereignty: Chinese Patrols at Contested Reefs," Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 26, 2019, <https://amti.csis.org/signaling-sovereignty-chinese-patrols-at-contested-reefs/>; Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "Still On the Beat: China Coast Guard Patrols in 2020," Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 4, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/still-on-the-beat-china-coast-guard-patrols-in-2020/>.

⁶¹⁴ Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "Malaysia Picks a Three-Way Fight in the South China Sea," Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 21, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/malaysia-picks-a-three-way-fight-in-the-south-china-sea/>; Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "China and Malaysia in Another Stare-down Over Offshore Drilling," Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 25, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/china-and-malaysia-in-another-stare-down-over-offshore-drilling/>; Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "Update: China Risks Flare-Up Over Malaysian, Vietnamese Gas Resources," Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 13, 2019, <https://amti.csis.org/china-risks-flare-up-over-malaysian-vietnamese-gas-resources/>; Michael Green et al., "Counter-Coercion Series: China-Vietnam Oil Rig Standoff," Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 12, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-oil-rig-standoff/>; James Pearson and Khanh Vu, "Vietnam, China embroiled in South China Sea standoff," *Reuters*, July 17, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-china-southchinasea/vietnam-china-embroiled-in-south-china-sea-standoff-idUSKCN1UC0MX>.

the South China Sea;⁶¹⁵ forced Japan's maritime and air Self-Defense Forces to repeatedly mobilize frequently enough to erode combat readiness;⁶¹⁶ protected the PRC distant water fishing fleets' illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing activities against enforcement from the maritime law enforcement of other countries;⁶¹⁷ and outright seized Scarborough Shoal from Philippine administration.⁶¹⁸ Likely because all of these activities employ ostensibly constabulary rather than military force, the U.S. has only on rare occasion deployed military force to check CCG or PAFMM activity.⁶¹⁹ Without the tools for proportional response to CCG/PAFMM gray zone coercion, the USG is less able to reassure allies and partners of the value of a U.S. security guarantees.⁶²⁰

CCP policies since 2005 have increased paranaval capacity and militarization. The CCG benefitted from a ship construction program between 2010 and 2017 that more than doubled its offshore-capable vessels (displacing 500 tons or more) to 225—more coast guard hulls than those operated by China's Southeast Asian neighbors combined.⁶²¹ The CCG's offshore-

⁶¹⁵ Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "Under Pressure: Philippine Construction Provokes a Paramilitary Response," Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 6, 2019, <https://amti.csis.org/under-pressure-philippine-construction-paramilitary-response/>; Michael Green et al., "Counter-Coercion Series: Second Thomas Shoal Incident," Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 9, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-2nd-thomas-shoal/>.

⁶¹⁶ Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Trends in Chinese Government and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and Japan's Response," updated December 7, 2020, https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/page23e_000021.html; *Kyodo News*, "Japan now instantly scrambles jets against China's from Fujian," July 19, 2020, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2020/07/c0f33e803562-japan-now-instantly-scrambles-jets-against-chinas-from-fujian.html>; Brad Lendon and Yoko Wakatsuki, "Japan's air force faces a 'relentless' burden, imposed by China," *CNN*, July 29, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/28/asia/japan-china-fighter-jet-scrambles-intl-hnk-dst/index.html>; Edmund J. Burke et al., *China's Military Activities in the East China Sea: Implications for Japan's Air Self-Defense Force*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2018), vi, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2500/RR2574/RAND_RR2574.pdf.

⁶¹⁷ Blake Herzinger, "China Is Fishing for Trouble at Sea," *Foreign Policy*, November 20, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/11/20/china-illegal-catch-fishing-biden-trump/>; Lisa McKinnon Munde, "The Great Fishing Competition," *War on the Rocks*, August 17, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/08/the-great-fishing-competition/>.

⁶¹⁸ Michael Green et al., "Counter-Coercion Series: Scarborough Shoal Standoff," Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 22, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-scarborough-standoff/>.

⁶¹⁹ Blake Herzinger, "Learning in the South China Sea: The U.S. Response to the West Capella Standoff," *War on the Rocks*, May 18, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/05/learning-in-the-south-china-sea-the-u-s-response-to-the-west-capella-standoff/>.

⁶²⁰ Lyle J. Morris et al., *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone: Response Options for Coercive Aggression Below the Threshold of Major War*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2019), ix, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2900/RR2942/RAND_RR2942.pdf.

⁶²¹ Andrew S. Erickson, "Maritime Numbers Game: Understanding and Responding to China's Three Sea Forces," *Indo-Pacific Defense Forum Magazine*, December 2018, 3, <http://www.andrewerickson.com/wp->

capable vessels are supported at over 200 CCG facilities, 40 of which are large bases able to accommodate offshore-capable patrol ships.⁶²²

Table 3: China Coast Guard Force Levels By Ship Displacement, 2005-2020⁶²³

FORCE LEVEL (VESSEL TYPE AND DISPLACEMENT IN TONS)	2005	2010	2017	2020
OCEANGOING PATROL SHIP (2,500-10,000)	3	5	55	60
REGIONAL PATROL SHIPS (1,000-2,499)	25	30	70	80
REGIONAL PATROL COMBATANTS (500-999)	30	65	100	120
COASTAL PATROL CRAFT (100-499)	350	400	450	450
INSHORE PATROL BOATS/MINOR CRAFT (<100)	500+	500+	600+	600+
TOTAL	900+	1,000+	1,275+	1,300+

Source: Joshua Hickey, Andrew S. Erickson, and Henry Holst, "China Maritime Law Enforcement Surface Platforms: Order of Battle, Capabilities, and Trends," in *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 110.

While estimates for PAFMM size are not readily available in the open source, satellite technology has revealed as many as 300 fishing boats likely to be PAFMM vessels at PRC-held islands in the South China Sea; similarly, as many as 91 PAFMM vessels have surged near Philippines-administered Thitu Island within a day.⁶²⁴ These figures likely account for only a fraction of PAFMM size. The PRC has subsidized fishing boat construction, militia training for

content/uploads/2019/01/Maritime-Numbers-Game-Understanding-Responding-to-Chinas-Three-Sea-Forces_Indo-Pacific-Defense-Forum-Magazine_December-2018.pdf; Joshua Hickey, Andrew S. Erickson, and Henry Holst, "China Maritime Law Enforcement Surface Platforms: Order of Battle, Capabilities, and Trends," in *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 129.

⁶²² Joshua Hickey, Andrew S. Erickson, and Henry Holst, "China Maritime Law Enforcement Surface Platforms: Order of Battle, Capabilities, and Trends," in *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2019), 110 & 126.

⁶²³ The Department of Defense's report on PRC military power includes in its appendix only offshore-capable CCG vessels. Not included in the reports' appendices tallies are coastal patrol craft and inshore patrol boats and other minor craft, though at least one report referenced these smaller vessels in narrative discussion. See U.S. Department of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017," May 15, 2017, 56 & 94, https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017_China_Military_Power_Report.PDF.

⁶²⁴ Gregory B. Poling, "Illuminating the South China Sea's Dark Fishing Fleets," Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 9, 2019, <https://ocean.csis.org/spotlights/illuminating-the-south-china-seas-dark-fishing-fleets/>; Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "The Long Patrol: Staredown at Thitu Island Enters its Sixteenth Month," Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 5, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/the-long-patrol-staredown-at-thitu-island-enters-its-sixteenth-month/>.

fishermen, and boat fuel since at least 2013.⁶²⁵ In 2015, the PRC NPC promulgated the Technical Standards for New Civilian Ships to Implement National Defense Requirements [新造民船贯彻国防要求技术标准] requiring all civilian ships to be built to military standards, which Chinese state media reported will “enable China to convert the considerable potential of its civilian fleet into military strength and will greatly enhance the PLA's strategic projection and maritime support capabilities.”⁶²⁶

Chinese paranaval preponderance in the near seas may be less of an outright advantage insofar as it indicates the higher force level needs of its gray zone strategies; Peter Dutton assesses that the CCP believes it needs to outnumber its adversaries by 3:1 or 4:1 in order to physically block them from completing their operations.⁶²⁷ Consistent with the PLA's approach of “residing the military within the civilian” for information warfare, the PLA also takes advantage of PAFMM numbers by reconceptualizing it as a floating ISR network, spanning China's shoreline and near seas, able to provide “effective maritime intelligence” by feeding targeting and tracking information into PLA theater command intelligence infrastructures.⁶²⁸ Contemporary PLA analysis discusses expanding PAFMM mobility and ISR capabilities, perhaps by augmenting the PRC's distant water fishing fleets, to reliably provide the PLA with far seas maritime domain awareness.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁵ Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, “China's Maritime Militia,” March 7, 2016, 25-27, https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/Chinas-Maritime-Militia.pdf.

⁶²⁶ Zhao Lei, “New rules mean ships can be used by military,” *China Daily*, June 18, 2015, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-06/18/content_21036944.htm; Ni Dawei [倪大为], “‘Technical Standards for New Civilian Ships to Implement National Defense Requirements’ is Promulgated and Implemented” [《新造民船贯彻国防要求技术标准》颁布实施], *PLA Daily*, February 19, 2016, http://www.mod.gov.cn/regulatory/2016-02/19/content_4617916.htm.

⁶²⁷ *Inkstone News*, “China doesn't have the capability for sea control,” January 4, 2019, <https://www.inkstonenews.com/opinion/peter-dutton-china-doesnt-have-capabilities-control-south-china-sea/article/2180187>.

⁶²⁸ Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), 271; Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, “China's Maritime Militia: An Important Force Multiplier,” in Michael A. McDevitt, *China as a Twenty First Century Naval Power: Theory, Practice, and Implications*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2020), 221-223.

⁶²⁹ Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, “China's Maritime Militia: An Important Force Multiplier,” in Michael A. McDevitt, *China as a Twenty First Century Naval Power: Theory, Practice, and Implications*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2020), 225. One example of PLA analysts discussing this, which Erickson and Kennedy discuss, is

While PLAN-CCG-PAFMM C2 and interoperability remain in development and challenging⁶³⁰ for PLA commanders, the long-term trajectory of the CCP's three sea forces is decidedly toward bolstering Chinese sea power with ostensibly civilian resources.⁶³¹ The CCP's burgeoning paranaul forces, while not likely able to exert outright sea control in a contested military environment, are increasingly capable of imposing prohibitive peacetime costs on Southeast Asian countries attempting to operate in the near seas; the CCP's paranaul forces simultaneously adds capacity and acts as a force multiplier for the PLAN, which is able to shift its focus and resources toward far seas operations with a robust maritime intelligence network. This approach challenges U.S. security guarantees for Southeast Asian countries by tailoring paramilitary coercion against these countries below the threshold of U.S. military response. CCP paranaul sea forces also contribute a latent military intelligence capability sustained by a broad network of coastal facilities for which the United States has no regional analog, potentially leaving the U.S. military at an ISR disadvantage in a high-end kinetic conflict.

Navies and their Defense Establishments

A powerful navy is composed not just of hulls, high-tech sensors, and sophisticated weaponry; a military and navy must also have the “software”—skilled sailors with expertise, seamanship, naval doctrine, and defense establishment support: David Gompert cogently

the proposal to build a common operating picture between maritime and space domains by leveraging civilian assets, such as PAFMM fishing fleets and the PRC's merchant marine, to support military situational awareness. See Zhu Dangming [朱党明] and Qin Daguo [秦大国], “Constructing a Versatile Operational Picture Integrated Across Space and Ocean Battlefields” [海天一体战场通用态势图构建], *Journal of Equipment Academy* [装备学院学报] 28, no. 2, (April 2017), 46-51.

⁶³⁰ Challenges to PLAN-CCG-PAFMM interservice coordination are not fully prohibitive of their joint operation. The three services already demonstrated incipient coordination capabilities in 2009 when harassing the U.S. naval surveillance ship *Impeccable* and in 2014 when protecting the Chinese HYSY-981 oil rig against Vietnamese vessels in disputed waters. Ian Burns McCaslin and Andrew S. Erickson, “The Impact of Xi-Era Reforms on the Chinese Navy,” in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders, et al., (Washington: National Defense University Press, 2019), 147-150.

⁶³¹ U.S. Department of Defense, “Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020,” 2020, 69-70, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>; Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, “China's Maritime Militia: An Important Force Multiplier,” in Michael A. McDevitt, *China as a Twenty First Century Naval Power: Theory, Practice, and Implications*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2020), 220.

observes that “sea power must be institutionalized, not just constructed.”⁶³² In the same way, the success of CCP maritime transformation will depend on its ability to institutionalize policies supporting its Navy. The most sophisticated ships and weapons will be less effective if suboptimally employed.⁶³³ Examples range throughout history. Imperial Rome initially built an impressive navy⁶³⁴ but trained no seamen, instead opting to bridge enemy warships with Roman ones using corvus⁶³⁵ to let Roman heavy infantry cross and conduct naval warfare as if fighting on land; despite early Roman successes, the Carthaginian navy eventually annihilated most of the Roman one in a single battle, leading Rome to eschew corvus and instead train sailors for naval warfare when rebuilding its navy.⁶³⁶ Imperial Germany’s naval buildup, beginning in the last years of the 19th century until the fleet’s destruction under the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, was a construction project without an accompanying plan for force employment necessary to comprise a sea power strategy, ultimately accruing enormous costs but no allies for Germany nor any hope of achieving the buildup’s chief objective of cowing the United Kingdom.⁶³⁷ Soviet leaders in pursuit of sea power consistently misunderstood naval technologies and set unbalanced shipbuilding policies focusing on either large surface fleets or ballistic missile

⁶³² David C. Gompert, *Sea Power and American Interests in the Western Pacific*, (Santa Clara: RAND Corporation, 2013), 5-6.

⁶³³ Peter M. Swartz, “Rising Powers and Naval Power,” in in *The Chinese Navy: Expanding Capabilities, Evolving Roles*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders, Christopher Yung, Michael Swaine, and Andrew Nien-Dzu Yang, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2011), 15.

⁶³⁴ Polybius’ account of Rome’s first war fleet includes one hundred quinqueremes and twenty triremes. Arthur M. Eckstein, “Rome Dominates the Mediterranean,” in *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 69.

⁶³⁵ The corvus was a Roman boarding device, in effect a ship-mounted drawbridge which could be lowered onto an adjacent vessel.

⁶³⁶ Tyrone G. Martin, “Aiding the Ascendancy of the Roman Navy,” *Naval History*, August 2016, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/naval-history-magazine/2016/august/armaments-innovations-aiding-ascendancy-roman-navy>; Arthur M. Eckstein, “Rome Dominates the Mediterranean,” in *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 74-75.

⁶³⁷ Evan Park, “The Nationalist Fleet: Radical Nationalism and The Imperial German Navy from Unification to 1914,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 16, iss. 2 (June 1, 2015), 125-160, <https://jmss.org/article/view/58166>; Holger H. Herwig, “Imperial Germany: Continental Titan, Global Aspirant,” in *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 183-185.

submarines without ever striking the appropriate surface-undersea balance advocated by its professional Navy leaders.⁶³⁸

Whether a country's defense establishment equips its navy to succeed is inherently difficult to measure, particularly in peacetime. Yet investigating whether software aspects amplify or dampen its hardware capabilities is a worthwhile endeavor even if precise determinations cannot be known with reasonable certainty. This subsection discusses important aspects of PLAN and broader PLA organizational cultures well as their impact on PLAN capabilities.

Asymmetry: The Party Military and Dual-Command Structure

Unlike the United States Armed Forces, the PLA is a party-army, not a national military; its command authority, the Central Military Commission, is a Party organization, and PLA members swear an oath to follow CCP leadership.⁶³⁹ Mao Zedong famously cast this identity for the PLA in a 1938 speech, wherein he reasoned that because “political power grows out the barrel of a gun,” so a CCP principle is that the “Party controls the gun.”⁶⁴⁰ This identity carries forward into the modern era: Jiang Zemin required that all PLA soldiers be “politically qualified,” Hu Jintao made reaffirming loyalty to the CCP the first of the PLA's four “New Historic Missions,” and Xi Jinping signed a first-of-its-kind regulation on PLA Party-building in part designed to “ensure the absolute leadership of the Party over the PLA” [对确保党对军队绝对领导].⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁸ Milan Vego, “Soviet Russia: The Rise and Fall of a Superpower Navy,” in *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 201-227; Robert C. Whitten, “Soviet sea power in retrospect: Admiral of the fleet of the Soviet Union Sergei G. Gorshkov and the rise and fall of the Soviet Navy,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 11, no. 2 (1998), 48-79, 51-53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518049808430340>.

⁶³⁹ Alison A. Kaufman and Peter W. Mackenzie, “Field Guide: The Culture of the Chinese People's Liberation Army,” CNA, February 2009, 3-4, https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/D0019770.A3.pdf.

⁶⁴⁰ 每个共产党员都应懂得这个真理：“枪杆子里面出政权”。我们的原则是党指挥枪，而决不容许枪指挥党。Mao Zedong, (speech, Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, November 6, 1938), <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/marxist.org-chinese-mao-19381106.htm> and <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/69112/70190/236641/16607155.html>.

⁶⁴¹ David Finkelstein, “China's National Military Strategy,” in *The People's Liberation Army in the Information Age*, eds. James C. Mulvenon and Richard H. Yang, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1999), 109, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF145/CF145.chap7.pdf; Daniel M. Hartnett, “The

Being a party-army has advantages not common to professional national militaries. The CCP's leadership of the PLA, when joined with its leadership of the PRC government apparatus and interpenetration of Chinese civil society, gives the Party an outsized ability to centrally coordinate state and society to support military efforts. One way this ability manifests is as an advantage in large-scale mobilization: Larry Wortzel finds that China has repeatedly mobilized on large scale since World War II and in these instances demonstrated that deployed PLAN and PLAAF units are likely to be supported by Chinese militia, reserves, and particularly effective civil communication and transportation assistance.⁶⁴² The PLA's ability to benefit from mobilization of civil communication resources ensures military consequence to Chinese civil technological developments, for example access to the successful work of Chinese SOEs in developing communication networks secured with quantum technology.⁶⁴³

Being a party-army also has notable disadvantages. For example, mechanisms for ensuring CCP control pervade and complicate the PLA's command structure. The CCP guarantees its control of the PLA through a political work [政治工作] system, which places a unit Party committee within the headquarters of any PLA organization at or above the regiment level.⁶⁴⁴ The committee is typically composed of the commanding officer, a political commissar, deputy commanders and commissars, and administrative directors; the commissar typically leads these committees, with the commanding officer as his deputy.⁶⁴⁵ The PLAN considers each of its vessels an organization, and all PLAN vessels considered to be at the regiment level

'New Historic Missions': Reflections on Hu Jintao's Military Legacy," in *Assessing the People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era*, (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2014), 33; *Xinhua*, "Leaders of the Central Military Commission Political Work Department Answered Questions on the 'Regulations on Party Building in the Armed Forces of the Communist Party of China'" [中央军委政治工作部领导就《中国共产党军队党的建设条例》答记者问], September 10, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2020-09/10/c_1210794627.htm.

⁶⁴² Larry M. Wortzel, "Military Mobilization in Communist China," *Association of the United States Army*, December 18, 2020, <https://www.ausa.org/publications/military-mobilization-communist-china>.

⁶⁴³ *Xinhua*, "China realizes secure, stable quantum communication network spanning 4,600 km," January 7, 2021, http://www.china.org.cn/china/2021-01/07/content_77088150.htm.

⁶⁴⁴ Kevin Pollpeter and Kenneth W. Allen, eds., "The PLA as Organization v 2.0," June 14, 2012, 40, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/Books/PLA_as_Organization_v2.pdf.

⁶⁴⁵ Kevin Pollpeter and Kenneth W. Allen, eds., "The PLA as Organization v 2.0," June 14, 2012, 41, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/Books/PLA_as_Organization_v2.pdf.

or above⁶⁴⁶ have a dual-command structure [双首长制] in which the commanding officer leads the military chain of command and the political commissar represents Party authority⁶⁴⁷ through the Party committee onboard each regiment-level ship.⁶⁴⁸ As such, PLAN captains and commissars have co-equal authority: military commands aboard the vessel are collectively determined under the vessel's political committee, and the vessel's commanding officer must accommodate and be held accountable to the directives set by its political committee.⁶⁴⁹

The dual-command structure onboard PLAN vessels poses multiple potential command and control challenges. First, the time necessary to coordinate between two co-equal leaders and then convene the political committee to hear and approve an agreed-upon decision, if one is in fact reached, is likely to delay command decisions of any significance. In the event of an international crisis during which a theater command joint headquarters may not have the information or capacity to provide a PLAN vessel's crew with detailed instructions, the personalities composing the vessel's political committee will have an outsized role in ensuring

⁶⁴⁶ These include frigates, destroyers, submarines, and support vessels. Jeff W. Benson and Zi Yang, "Party on the Bridge: Political Commissars in the Chinese Navy," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 7, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/200626_BensonYang_PartyOnTheBridge_Web_v2.pdf.

⁶⁴⁷ The modern PLA's designation of its political commissars as nominally ranked below but in reality more influential than its military commanders is reflected at the highest levels, with CMC Vice Chairman Xu Qiliang [许其亮] and Zhang Youxia [张又侠]. Xu has little personal relationship with Xi Jinping, and his portfolio covers much of the military administration and operations work; Xi likely selected him in large part because Xu was the most senior PLA commander not embroiled in influence cartels loyal to prior commanders. By contrast, Xi personally selected Zhang, his childhood friend, whose personal relationship with Xi and battlefield command experience likely makes him more influential in decision making than Xu; Zhang's portfolio includes political affairs and discipline enforcement, making him the PLA's "paramount political commissar." See You Ji, "How Xi Jinping Dominates Elite Party Politics," *The China Journal* 84, (2020), 1-28, 17-20, <https://doi.org/10.1086/708647>.

⁶⁴⁸ Zhou Xiaoming [周晓明], "Correctly Handle the Relationship Between Military and Political Officers" [正确处理军政主官之间的关系], *Big Mouth Military Forum* [大嘴军事论坛], August 4, 2008, <http://www.defence.org.cn/article-2-21999.html>; Jeff W. Benson and Zi Yang, "Party on the Bridge: Political Commissars in the Chinese Navy," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 7, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/200626_BensonYang_PartyOnTheBridge_Web_v2.pdf; Kenneth Allen and Aaron Shraberg, "Assessing the Grade Structure for China's Aircraft Carriers: Part 1," *China Brief*, July 15, 2011, <https://jamestown.org/program/assessing-the-grade-structure-for-chinas-aircraft-carriers-part-1/>.

⁶⁴⁹ Jeff W. Benson and Zi Yang, "Party on the Bridge: Political Commissars in the Chinese Navy," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 14-15, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/200626_BensonYang_PartyOnTheBridge_Web_v2.pdf

the vessel neither falls into operational paralysis nor exhibits unpredictable behaviors which may foster destabilizing adversary misperceptions.⁶⁵⁰

The dual-command structure also poses a likely challenge to PLA professionalism, as commanding officers are likely to be overruled, outvoted, or noted to be out of step with Party objectives in the event their professional military assessments do not accord with the Party's political imperative.⁶⁵¹ Military professionalism in the PLA has measurably eroded since 2002, when David Shambaugh observed that senior PLA officers "are now promoted on meritocratic and professional criteria, while political consciousness and activism count for very little," suggesting significant professional autonomy for the officer corps.⁶⁵² Sofia Ledberg's more recent research indicates this trend may have reversed, with the Political Work Department integrating itself into the military command structure such that, while PLA officers are given what appears to be a significant degree of professional autonomy, only the ideologically approved will be in a position to exercise this autonomy because "every leadership position in the regular military system simultaneously constitutes a checkpoint of Party control."⁶⁵³

These problems are likely to grow as the role and authority of political commissars continues to accumulate and overlap into those of military commanders. Chinese state media

⁶⁵⁰ PLA leaders find that PLA officers often fail to accurately judge a situation, make operational decisions, or understand the intentions of higher authorities. As such, PLA vessels and regiments likely face considerable risk of acting erroneously or perhaps not acting at all when not given detailed instruction. Some PLA officers have reported an unwillingness to act due to a perception that "the more we do, the greater our chance of making mistakes." See *PLA Daily*, "With my Organization Backing Me, I Will Do My Duty" [组织给我当靠山 我为事业尽责任], February 18, 2020, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2020-02/18/content_254330.htm; Dennis J. Blasko, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on *Backlash from Abroad: The Limits of Beijing's Power to Shape its External Environment*, February 7, 2019, 7, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Blasko_USCC%20Testimony_FINAL.pdf.

⁶⁵¹ This is one facet of the thoroughly-studied "red vs. expert" tension between adherence to Party-authorized assessments and those derived from technical expertise. A non-exhaustive list of studies on this topic includes A. Doak Barnett, *Cadres, Bureaucracy, and Political Power in Communist China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967); Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); D.J. Waller, "China: Red or Expert?" *The Political Quarterly* 38, iss. 2, (1967), 122-131, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-923X.1967.tb00667.x>; and Richard D. Baum, "'Red and Expert': The Politico-Ideological Foundations of China's Great Leap Forward," *Asian Survey* 4, no. 9, (1964), 1048-1057, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2642397>.

⁶⁵² David Shambaugh, "Civil-Military Relations in China: Party-Army or National Military?" *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 16, (2002), 10-29, 13, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/230364595.pdf>.

⁶⁵³ Sofia K. Ledberg, "Analysing Chinese Civil-Military Relations: A Bottom-Up Approach," *The China Quarterly* 234, (2018), 377-398, 395, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741018000401>.

reports indicate growing agitation within the PLA in response to an aggrandizing Political Work Department. Some PLA divisions are instituting new standards requiring political commissars to be able to organize military training⁶⁵⁴ and command troops in battle.⁶⁵⁵ Other units have reported a broad sense that political work has little to no bearing on combat capabilities, requiring commanders to retool political work to match combat requirements and, though left implied, reassert professional military interest against time-consuming political work requirements.⁶⁵⁶

CCP leadership clearly favors commissars over commanders in this tension.⁶⁵⁷ Xi Jinping caustically undercut confidence in the PLA's professional capabilities by describing the PLA as needing to "train a new type of military personnel who are competent, professional and possess both integrity and ability" in a 2019 speech.⁶⁵⁸ In the same month Xi impugned PLA commanders' abilities, the CMC reaffirmed the role of political work in the PLA, issuing guidelines which described a need to "purify" the PLA's "political ecology" from the corruption of past commanders.⁶⁵⁹ Tightening the CCP's grip over the PLA, in 2020 the CMC issued trial, then final regulations on military supervision, which a PRC spokesman described as the "first time a comprehensive and systematic regulation of Party building in the military was specifically made."⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁴ PLA commissars are typically chosen from company-grade officers with some operational experience and receive limited professional military education thereafter. Kenneth Allen, Brian Chao, and Ryan Kinsella, "China's Military Political Commissar System in Comparative Perspective," *China Brief*, March 4, 2013, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-military-political-commissar-system-in-comparative-perspective/>.

⁶⁵⁵ Pan Mengting [潘梦婷], "Train on the Front Lines to Hone Command Abilities" [演练一线淬砺指挥素养], *PLA Daily*, August 23, 2020, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2020-08/23/content_269148.htm.

⁶⁵⁶ Li Yongfei [李永飞], Duan Kaishang [段开尚], and Gao Mingjun [高明俊], "The First Wartime Political Work Exercise, Why the Three Reform Plan?" [一次战时政治工作演练, 为何三改方案], *PLA Daily*, August 17, 2020, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2020-08/17/content_268723.htm.

⁶⁵⁷ The next three sentences of this paragraph track assessments first published in U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Annual Report to Congress, December 2020, 343-344, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/2020_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf.

⁶⁵⁸ *Xinhua*, "Xi stresses cultivating new type of military personnel," November 27, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-11/27/c_138587576.htm.

⁶⁵⁹ *PLA Daily*, "Central Military Commission Issues 'Opinions on Strengthening Party Building in the PLA'" [中央军委印发《关于加强军队党的政治建设的意见》], November 18, 2019, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2019-11/18/content_247703.htm.

⁶⁶⁰ "首次专门对军队党的建设作出全面系统规范, 是构建军队党内法规制度体系的创新举措。" *Xinhua*, "Leaders of the

Trend: Ground Force Dominance and Resistance to Reform

The PLAN's operational capabilities are further undermined by PLAGF resistance to adopting the size, shape, and doctrine that top PLA and civilian CCP leaders sought, hampering military-wide reforms. PLAGF defense of its organizational interests, particularly those in conflict with the broader CCP vision for its military, likely contribute to repeated delays and failures of attempted PLA reforms and in so doing undermine overall force readiness and lethality.

From its inception, the PLA has been overwhelmingly dominated by its ground force. Mao Zedong's own military experience was in fighting protracted ground conflicts which leveraged force mobility and peasant mobilization to defeat the Japanese and Republic of China militaries from a position of weakness.⁶⁶¹ The revolutionary stature of the PLAGF instilled it with institutionalized prominence among PLA services: until 2016, the PLA used a system of military regions, first devised in the 1940s around PLAGF defense of China's borders, which provided the PLAGF with institutionalized C2 capabilities but relegated peacetime command of PLAN, PLAAF, or Second Artillery (now PLARF) forces stationed in the region to service leaders generally outside the theater.⁶⁶² Because of the PLAGF's advantage in sheer size and influence beyond other services, most commanders and important staff for each military region or for the general department tended to be PLAGF officers.⁶⁶³

PLAGF commanders also dominated CMC membership to the exclusion of other services for the majority of their existence: PLAGF commanders had been CMC members since

Central Military Commission Political Work Department Answered Questions on the 'Regulations on Party Building in the Armed Forces of the Communist Party of China' [中央军委政治工作部领导就《中国共产党军队党的建设条例》答记者问], September 10, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2020-09/10/c_1210794627.htm.

⁶⁶¹ M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 49-52 & 66-67.

⁶⁶² David M. Finkelstein, "Breaking the Paradigm: Drivers Behind the PLA's Current Period of Reform," in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, ed. Phillip C. Saunders et al., (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 61, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/82/Documents/books/Chairman-Xi.pdf?ver=2019-03-14-110008-073>.

⁶⁶³ Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, *Chinese Military Reforms in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2017), 30, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-10.pdf>.

1956, but the addition of top commanders from the PLAN, PLAAF, and Second Artillery Force to CMC membership were not institutionalized until September 2004, at which point no PLAN or Second Artillery Force commander had previously served on the CMC, though PLAAF top commanders Liu Yalou [刘亚楼] and Zhang Tingfa [张廷发] served on the CMC from 1956-1965 and from 1977-1982, respectively.⁶⁶⁴ An apparent gap in prestige between services persisted into the recent past. Liu Huaqing, who served as the PLAN's top officer and was known as the "Father of China's modern navy" and the "Father of China's aircraft carrier," spent most of his military career in the ground force and changed his PLAN uniform for a PLAGF uniform when he joined the Central Military Commission under Jiang Zemin.⁶⁶⁵

PLAGF dominance of the PLA has frustrated efforts at reform and modernization when they ran contrary to PLAGF organizational interests. Since adopting the 1993 Military Strategic Guidance, the PLA has been attempting to transition from a force geared to fight mobile, positional, or guerilla ground campaigns to one able to conduct joint operations that combine ground, air, and naval capabilities.⁶⁶⁶ Progress on this effort has been halting. Ten years after the 1993 MSG was adopted, the PRC released its 2004 Defense White Paper, reinforcing that "priority [is] given to the Navy, Air Force, and Second Artillery Force" to strengthen the PLA's "comprehensive deterrence and warfighting capabilities."⁶⁶⁷ That same year, Hu Jintao

⁶⁶⁴ Kevin Pollpeter and Kenneth W. Allen, eds., "The PLA as Organization v 2.0," June 14, 2012, 91, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/Books/PLA_as_Organization_v2.pdf; U.S. *National Air & Space Intelligence Center*, "The People's Liberation Army Air Force 2010," August 1, 2010, 48, https://web.archive.org/web/20110815154405/http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/nasic/pla_af_2010.pdf; Kenneth Allen, "Assessing Who Will Be the Next PLA Navy Commander," *China Brief*, September 20, 2016, <https://jamestown.org/program/assessing-will-next-pla-navy-commander/>.

⁶⁶⁵ Chen Liangfei [陈良飞], "Father of China's Aircraft Carrier Liu Huaqing: If China Does Not Build Aircraft Carriers, I Cannot Die in Peace" ["中国航母之父"刘华清: 如果中国不建航母, 我死不瞑目], *The Paper* [澎湃新闻], September 30, 2019, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1536945; You Ji, "How Xi Jinping Dominates Elite Party Politics," footnote 45, *The China Journal* 84, (2020), 1-28, 19, <https://doi.org/10.1086/708647>; Kenneth Allen, "Assessing the PLA's Promotion Ladder to CMC Member Based on Grades vs. Ranks – Part 2," endnote 3, *China Brief*, August 5, 2010, <https://jamestown.org/program/assessing-the-plas-promotion-ladder-to-cmc-member-based-on-grades-vs-ranks-part-2/>.

⁶⁶⁶ M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 60 & 183.

⁶⁶⁷ PRC State Council Information Office, *China's National Defense in 2004*, December 2004, <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20041227/index.htm>.

announced the PLA's "New Historic Missions," extending PLA missions well outside of China's borders.⁶⁶⁸ Another ten years later, the lethargic rate of change in PLA reform strongly indicated that PLAGF was obstructing the long-term changes in force structure and prestige that would be necessary to shift from a focus on land warfare to joint expeditionary operations. For example, analysts have observed that the PLAGF did not adopt the largely noncombat and constabulary mission set required of PLAGF under the New Historic Missions.⁶⁶⁹ Further, the 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* specifically urged that the PLAGF needs to "conform to the development trends of informatized war [as first adopted in the 1993 MSG] and those of ground forces around the world by casting off the traditional "Big Army" mentality," in order to successfully transition toward joint operations.⁶⁷⁰ Twenty years after the 1993 MSG called for the PLA to transition its operational model toward joint operations, PLA analysts recognized that bureaucratic opposition from the PLAGF has obstructed reform toward a joint command system or joint warfighting capability while militaries in other countries were able to make similar transitions successfully.⁶⁷¹

Xi Jinping spearheaded comprehensive, fundamental reforms to the PLA's organizational structure to overcome PLAGF dominance and build a meaningful joint warfighting capability in the PLA.⁶⁷² The CCP Central Committee first adopted a formal decision to undertake sweeping

⁶⁶⁸ Daniel M. Hartnett, "The 'New Historic Missions': Reflections on Hu Jintao's Military Legacy," in *Assessing the People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era*, (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2014), 34.

⁶⁶⁹ John Chen, "Choosing the 'Least Bad Option': Organizational Interests and Change in the PLA Ground Forces," in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders et al., (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 105-106.

⁶⁷⁰ "总的来看，要顺应信息化战争和世界陆军发展趋势，摆脱传统的"大陆军"思维，从立足" Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), 200; Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, *Chinese Military Reforms in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2017), 30, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-10.pdf>.

⁶⁷¹ Tai Ming Cheung, "The Riddle in the Middle: China's Central Military Commission in the Twenty-first Century," in *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 113; Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, "China's Goldwater Nichols? Assessing PLA Organizational Reforms," *Joint Force Quarterly* 82, (2016), 68-75, 73, https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-82/jfq-82_68-75_Saunders-Wuthnow.pdf.

⁶⁷² For excellent studies on the drivers and outcomes of these reforms, see Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, *Chinese Military Reforms in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2017), <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-10.pdf>; Phillip C. Saunders et al., eds., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/82/Documents/books/Chairman-Xi.pdf?ver=2019-03->

PLA reforms in 2013, and the details of reform were laid out in a Xi Jinping speech in 2015, CMC guidance given in 2016, and the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for Military Development also released in 2016.⁶⁷³ Joel Wuthnow and Phil Saunders summarize the reform's objectives as:

- rebalancing service composition to put more weight on naval, air, and missile forces
- creating the PLA Strategic Support Force and PLA Joint Logistics Support Force, which provided critical operational support to joint commanders
- removing the service chiefs from operational chain of command, while granting theater commanders operational oversight over all conventional forces within their respective regions
- establishing an independent training department under the CMC to formulate and enforce joint training standards
- revising professional military educational curricula to put more emphasis on joint operations
- increasing specialized forces, such as amphibious and helicopter units, that would be essential to a joint campaign.⁶⁷⁴

As of the end of 2020, PLA reforms have not successfully rebalanced influence among the services, and PLAGF officers remain in the majority of leadership positions in the reformed structure. One of the earliest and most important aspects of the reform was transitioning the PLA from its revolutionary-era system of seven military regions, designed for PLAGF defense against invasion, to five theater commands, intended to support joint expeditionary operations, presumably with PLAAF and PLAN leaders. The old system made military region commanders responsible for force building tasks and created ad hoc commands to conduct any wartime operations.⁶⁷⁵ To sharpen the theater commands' focus on developing a joint warfighting

14-110008-073.

⁶⁷³ CCP Central Committee, "Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Decision on Several Important Questions on Comprehensively Deepening Reform" [中共中央关于全面深化改革若干重大问题的决定], November 12, 2013, http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2013-11/15/content_2528179.htm; *Xinhua*, "Xi Jinping: Comprehensively Implement the Strategy of Reforming and Strengthening the Military, Unswervingly Follow the Path of A Powerful Military with Chinese Characteristics" [习近平:全面实施改革强军战略 坚定不移走中国特色强军之路], November 26, 2015, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-11/26/c_1117274869.htm; *Xinhua*, "Central Military Commission Opinion on Deepening National Defense and Military Reform" [中央军委关于深化国防和军队改革的意见], January 1, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2016-01/01/c_1117646695.htm; *Xinhua*, "Central Military Commission Issues 'Outline of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for Military Building and Development'" [中央军委颁发《军队建设发展“十三五”规划纲要》], May 12, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2016-05/12/c_1118855988.htm.

⁶⁷⁴ Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, "Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA," in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 13, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/82/Documents/books/Chairman-Xi.pdf?ver=2019-03-14-110008-073>.

⁶⁷⁵ Edmund J. Burke and Arthur Chan, "Coming to a (New) Theater Near You," in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 234,

capability, the reforms shifted non-warfighting responsibilities to PLA organs outside the theater command and institutionalized theater command leadership with permanent C2 mechanisms for joint operations.⁶⁷⁶

While PLAN and PLAAF commanders made marginal leadership gains because of these reforms, PLAGF generals maintained most of the senior leadership roles in the theater command as well as external organs responsible for noncombat military affairs. Where PLAGF generals led all seven of the PLA's pre-reform military regions, they lead only three of the post-reform theater commands, ceding leadership in the Southern Theater Command to PLAN Admiral Yuan Yubai [袁誉柏] and in the Central Theater Command to PLAAF General Yi Xiaoguang [乙晓光].⁶⁷⁷ In these theater commands, however, PLAGF influence persists through a preponderance of PLAGF officers staffed at the deputy level.⁶⁷⁸ The PLAGF maintained its hold on leadership of the CMC Joint Staff Department, which is responsible for joint operations: PLAGF General Fang Fenghui [房峰辉] held the inaugural position until PLAGF top officer Li Zuocheng [李作成] took over the position in 2017.⁶⁷⁹

The theater commands' permanent joint C2 mechanisms may in fact extend the power of PLAGF commanders leading the Northern, Eastern, and Western Theater Commands as well

<https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/82/Documents/books/Chairman-Xi.pdf?ver=2019-03-14-110008-073>.

⁶⁷⁶ Edmund J. Burke and Arthur Chan, "Coming to a (New) Theater Near You," in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 237, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/82/Documents/books/Chairman-Xi.pdf?ver=2019-03-14-110008-073>.

⁶⁷⁷ Guo Yuandan [郭媛丹], "Yuan Yubai Appointed Southern Theater Command Commander, Shattering Ground Force's Unified Domain" [袁誉柏任南部战区司令 打破陆军大一统], *Global Times*, January 22, 2017, <https://china.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrNJZWT9>; Song Ruxin [宋如鑫], "'Celebrity General' Yi Xiaoguang Takes Power at the Central Theater Command, Career Prospects Rising" ["明星将领"乙晓光执掌中部战区 仕途看涨], *Duowei News* [多维新闻], October 18, 2017, <https://www.dwnews.com/中国/60010220/明星将领乙晓光执掌中部战区仕途看涨>.

⁶⁷⁸ Edmund J. Burke and Arthur Chan, "Coming to a (New) Theater Near You," in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 237, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/82/Documents/books/Chairman-Xi.pdf?ver=2019-03-14-110008-073>.

⁶⁷⁹ Phillip C. Saunders and John Chen, "Is the Chinese Army the Real Winner in PLA Reforms?" *Joint Force Quarterly* 83, (2016), 44-48, 46, https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-83/jfq-83_44-48_Saunders-Chen.pdf; Lin Yunshi [林韵诗], "PLA Ground Force Commander Li Zuocheng Appointed Chief of Staff of the Central Military Commission Joint Staff Department" [陆军司令员李作成任军委联合参谋部参谋长], *Caixin*, August 27, 2017, <http://china.caixin.com/2017-08-27/101136232.html>.

as the CMC Joint Staff Department. Previously, the PLAGF commanders leading each military region only had peacetime command authority over the PLAGF forces in each region, with command authority for PLAN, PLAAF, and Second Artillery forces vested in other organs; under the new theater command structure, these PLAGF commanders now exert operational command over units of any service in their commands in wartime and peacetime.⁶⁸⁰

Another way the PLAGF maintained its influence during the shift from military regions to theater commands is by maintaining a system of PLAGF headquarters parallel to the joint PLA headquarters in each theater command. While still the PLAGF top commander, Li Zuocheng argued that keeping PLAGF headquarters separate would foster joint capabilities by giving the joint structure space to shed the PLAGF's influence.⁶⁸¹ Whether or not that was the driving rationale, the headquarters were kept separate, to the significant organizational benefit of the PLAGF. As a result, the PLAGF headquarters in each theater command, not the joint headquarters, enjoys direct command responsibility for operational PLAGF units in the theater, and the joint headquarters must communicate with PLAGF units in its area of responsibility through the local PLAGF headquarters.⁶⁸² The top PLAGF commander and political commissar in each theater command also serve as de facto deputy commander and commissar for the full theater command.⁶⁸³

A final service-wide metric of persistent PLAGF influence at the cost of other services is the service mix of top-level PLA officers. As shown in Table 4 below, PLAGF dominance over other

⁶⁸⁰ Phillip C. Saunders and John Chen, "Is the Chinese Army the Real Winner in PLA Reforms?" *Joint Force Quarterly* 83, (2016), 44-48, 46, https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-83/jfq-83_44-48_Saunders-Chen.pdf.

⁶⁸¹ "不建立陆军领导机构，联合指挥机构就难以摆脱陆军属性，就不是真正意义上的联合作战指挥，也无法做到对各军兵种等同等距指挥和保障。" Feng Chunmei [冯春梅] and Ni Guanghui [倪光辉], "Ground Force Commander Li Zuocheng Accepts Media Interview for the First Time" [陆军司令员李作成首次接受媒体采访], *People's Daily*, January 31, 2016, http://www.81.cn/jwgz/2016-01/31/content_6882034.htm.

⁶⁸² Dennis J. Blasko, "The Biggest Loser in Chinese Military Reforms," in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders et al., (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 352.

⁶⁸³ Dennis J. Blasko, "The Biggest Loser in Chinese Military Reforms," in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders et al., (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 352.

services also persisted in promotions to General/Admiral [上将], the equivalent of a U.S. four-star officer. Even after the 2015 reforms broke the Strategic Support Force (SSF) out from within the PLAGF, the ground force dominated promotions to General rank with only a modest increase in promotions among other services.

Table 4: PLA Promotions to General [上将] By Service and Year, 2012-2020

YEAR	PLAGF	PLAN	PLAAF	PLARF	SSF
2012	5	0	1	1	0
2013	6	0	0	0	0
2014	4	0	0	0	0
2015	8	0	0	0	0
2016	1	0	1	0	0
2017	2	0	1	2	1
2018	0	0	0	0	0
2019	9	3	2	1	1
2020	1	0	1	1	1

Sources: various.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁸⁴ *Xinhua*, “Central Military Commission Holds PAP and PLA General Promotion Ceremony, Xi Jinping Awards PLA and PAP Officer Ranks and Issues Congratulations” [中央军委举行晋升上将军衔警衔仪式 习近平颁发命令状并向晋衔的军官警官表示祝贺], December 12, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-12/18/c_1126879375.htm; *Xinhua*, “Central Military Commission Holds PLA General Promotion Ceremony, Xi Jinping Issues the Writ of Advancement and Congratulations” [中央军委举行晋升上将军衔仪式 习近平颁发命令状并向晋衔的军官表示祝贺], July 29, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-07/29/c_1126300876.htm; *Xinhua*, “Central Military Commission Holds PLA General Promotion Ceremony, Xi Jinping Issues the Writ of Advancement and Congratulations” [中央军委举行晋升上将军衔仪式 习近平颁发命令状并向晋衔的军官表示祝贺], December 12, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-12/12/c_1125340398.htm; *Xinhua*, “Central Military Commission Holds PAP and PLA General Promotion Ceremony, Xi Jinping Awards PLA and PAP Officer Ranks and Issues Congratulations” [中央军委举行晋升上将军衔警衔仪式 习近平颁发命令状并向晋衔的军官警官表示祝贺], July 31, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-07/31/c_1124821982.htm; *People’s Daily*, “High Definition Pictures: Taking Stock of Xi Jinping’s Military Steps Since the 19th Party Congress” [高清图集：盘点十九大以来习近平的军队足迹], August 1, 2018, https://china.chinadaily.com.cn/2018-08/01/content_36684231_4.htm; *Xinhua*, “Central Military Commission Holds PLA General Promotion Ceremony, Xi Jinping Issues Orders” [中央军委举行晋升上将军衔仪式 习近平颁发命令状], July 28, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-07/28/c_1121397524.htm; *Xinhua*, “Xi Jinping Issues Orders to Newly Promoted Generals” [习近平向晋升上将军衔的军官颁发命令状], July 29, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-07/29/c_1119306493.htm; *Xinhua*, “Central Military Commission Holds PLA and PAP General Promotion Ceremony, Xi Jinping Issues Orders” [中央军委举行晋升上将军衔警衔仪式 习近平颁发命令状], July 31, 2015, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2015/0731/c64094-27394362.html>; *People’s Daily*, “Central Military Commission Holds PLA General Promotion Ceremony, Xi Jinping Issues the Writ of Advancement and Congratulations” [中央军委举行晋升上将军衔仪式 习近平颁发命令状并向晋衔的军官表示祝贺], July 12, 2014, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0712/c64094-25272406.html>; *Xinhua*, “Central Military Commission Holds PLA General Promotion Ceremony, Xi Jinping Issues Orders” [中央军委举行晋升上将军衔仪式 习近平颁发命令状], July 31, 2013, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2013/0731/c64094-22394583.html>; *Xinhua*, “Central Military Commission Holds PLA General Promotion Ceremony, Xi Jinping Issues Orders to and Congratulates Promoted General Wei Fenghe” [中央军委举行晋升上将军衔仪式 习近平向晋升上将军衔的魏凤和颁发命令状并表示祝贺], November 23, 2012, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-11/23/c_113783855.htm; *Xinhua*, “Central Military Commission Holds PAP and PLA General Promotion Ceremony” [中央军委举行晋升上将军衔警衔仪式], July 30, 2012, http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2012-07/30/content_2195167.htm. No information was found on promotions occurring in calendar year 2018.

PLAGF dominance and continued resistance to reform have negatively affected PLA reform efforts. While the effects of PLAGF resistance on the PLA's joint warfighting capability, and on the PLAN in particular, is not addressed in the open source, several indicators of the PLAGF resistance's negative impact on the PLA as a whole are publicly accessible. One measurable indicator is reform timeliness: the PLA has consistently missed self-imposed milestones and deadlines for reform. Joel Wuthnow has testified before the USG that, according to the CCP's timeline for comprehensive reform, "the PLA has been consistently behind schedule over the last five years."⁶⁸⁵ He cites as examples a delay of over a year for a 300,000-person downsizing and delays of up to or over four years when reforming the military education system, the People's Armed Police, and the PLA reserves.⁶⁸⁶ The PRC Ministry of National Defense has also confirmed that the PLA's major policy reforms, initially scheduled for completion in 2020, was now projected to drag on into 2022.⁶⁸⁷ Similarly, the PLA appears likely to have missed the 2020 milestone in its three-step modernization timeline⁶⁸⁸ to "basically achieve mechanization."⁶⁸⁹ Wuthnow describes the PLA as burdened with equipment and doctrine that are outdated by its own standards, with the PLAGF as the worst offender: as of

⁶⁸⁵ Joel Wuthnow, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on U.S.-China in 2020: Enduring Problems and Emerging Challenges, September 9, 2020, 6, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/Wuthnow_Testimony.pdf.

⁶⁸⁶ Joel Wuthnow, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on U.S.-China in 2020: Enduring Problems and Emerging Challenges, September 9, 2020, 6, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/Wuthnow_Testimony.pdf.

⁶⁸⁷ *People's Daily*, "Ministry of National Defense: Military Policy System Reform Is Progressing in an Orderly Manner" [国防部: 军事政策制度改革有序推进], August 27, 2020, http://www.mod.gov.cn/topnews/2020-08/27/content_4870180.htm.

⁶⁸⁸ See the section on "CCP Military Strategy: Toward a World-Class Navy".

⁶⁸⁹ Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" [习近平: 决胜全面建成小康社会 夺取新时代中国特色社会主义伟大胜利——在中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会上的报告], (speech, Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017), http://www.gov.cn/zhuant/2017-10/27/content_5234876.htm.

2017, half of the PLAGF's infantry brigades were still considered "motorized," the modernization⁶⁹⁰ stage the PLA designates as prior to being mechanized.⁶⁹¹

Another indicator is public PLA criticism of its ground force commanders. In an unusual step, the Eastern Theater Command produced a 43-episode TV drama entitled *Blue Strike* [《蓝军出击》], about a PLAGF "Blue Force" that reveals the weaknesses of PLA brigades in adversarial trainings in order to highlight the "labor pains" [阵痛] of modernization stemming from the PLAGF officers' halfhearted or false compliance with PLA reforms. One report explains that the series shows the extent to which "at the outset of reform, many leaders went through the motions of reform without internalizing it; their uniforms have changed, but their mindsets have not; and their ideas cannot keep up with the needs of a strong military."⁶⁹²

PLAGF capabilities lagging reform milestones puts the PLAGF role in joint operations in doubt and potentially imposes harsh trade-offs with other missions, including those that prioritize the PLAN. This tension is perhaps most keenly felt between PLA missions regarding Taiwan and those regarding the far seas. Although the PLAN was initially intended to support a PLA campaign to conquer Taiwan and its offshore islands, by the early 2000s, PLAN leaders and advocates were looking past Taiwan to tie the service's importance instead to protecting foreign

⁶⁹⁰ Official PLA sources describe modernization as a multi-stage process. The earliest are termed "on foot" [徒步化] and "pack animalization," [骡马化] defined by the widespread use of foot marches and pack animals to move troops and equipment. With the industrial revolution arriving in China came the next stage of modernization called "motorization," describing the PLA's transition toward employing motorized vehicles for equipment transportation and infantry maneuver. Motorization precedes "mechanization," which is characterized by the use of heavy, sometimes tracked, vehicles such as tanks and self-propelled artillery. Chinese state media declared the PLA fully motorized and partially mechanized by 1985. Full mechanization has required a further decades-long process that remains ongoing. Chen Hui [陈辉] and Chang Ailing [常爱玲], "The Chinese Military's 80-Year Historic Leap" [中国军队 80 年的历史性跨越], *Xinhua*, July 5, 2008, http://guoqing.china.com.cn/2008-07/05/content_23783481.htm.

⁶⁹¹ Dennis J. Blasko, "What is Known and Unknown about Changes to the PLA's Ground Combat Units," *China Brief*, May 11, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/known-unknown-changes-plas-ground-combat-units/>; Joel Wuthnow, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on U.S.-China in 2020: Enduring Problems and Emerging Challenges, September 9, 2020, 7-9, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/Wuthnow_Testimony.pdf.

⁶⁹² "军改之初还有很多干部转身不转心、换装不换脑，理念跟不上强军需要" Qiao Hui [乔辉], "'Blue Strike': Welcome New Life in the Labor Pains of Transformation" [《蓝军出击》：在转型的阵痛中迎接新生], *Guangming Daily* [光明日报], October 2, 2020, https://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2020-10/02/nw.D110000gmrb_20201002_3-08.htm.

investments and sea lanes—missions requiring a far seas naval capability.⁶⁹³ Rather, the PLAGF has positioned itself to be a likely interservice lead for a joint firepower strike or island invasion⁶⁹⁴ of Taiwan.⁶⁹⁵ Several factors make the PLAGF exceptionally well-positioned for this role: the ground forces have more and better-equipped amphibious assault forces than the PLAN Marine Corps; PLAGF headquarters exercise command over PLA border and coastal defense units in the Eastern Theater Command; and PLAGF headquarters organizes annual joint PLA exercises (“Firepower”) to develop artillery support capabilities.⁶⁹⁶ In addition to having greater amphibious capacity than the PLAN Marine Corps, the PLAGF is developing a multiple launch rocket system (MLRS) precision strike capability that is more affordable than comparable PLARF missiles; the PLAGF’s PCL-191 MLRS is reportedly able to target any installation on Taiwan or off the island’s eastern coast, and at a third of a cost of PLARF missiles at the same range, they will likely also be built in greater number.⁶⁹⁷ Amphibious assault is a core PLAN

⁶⁹³ Bernard D. Cole, “More Red than Expert: Chinese Sea Power during the Cold War,” in *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, eds. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 323-235; David G. Mueller, Jr., *China as a Maritime Power: The Formative Years: 1945-1983*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 20-22; M. Taylor Fravel and Alexander Libman, “Beyond the Moat: The PLAN’s Evolving Interests and Political Influence,” in *The Chinese Navy: Expanding Capabilities, Evolving Roles*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders, Christopher Yung, Michael Swaine, and Andrew Nien-Dzu Yang, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2011), 42 & 76; Daniel M. Hartnett and Frederic Vellucci, “Toward a Maritime Security Strategy: An Analysis of Chinese Views Since the Early 1990s” in *The Chinese Navy: Expanding Capabilities, Evolving Roles*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders, Christopher Yung, Michael Swaine, and Andrew Nien-Dzu Yang, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2011), 103.

⁶⁹⁴ Publicly available PLA literature describes three primary types of joint campaigns it might conduct against Taiwan: island blockade, island offensive, and joint firepower strike. An island blockade is a physical blockade of goods transiting in and out of Taiwan’s air and seaports; an island offensive constitutes an amphibious invasion followed by ground assault; and a joint firepower strike uses precision strike technologies to strike key military and civilian targets on the main Taiwan island. While the PLAN would likely lead a joint island blockade, the PLAGF has the leading role in the joint firepower strike and especially the joint island offensive campaigns. See Li Yousheng [李有升], Li Yin [李云], and Wang Yonghua [王永华], eds., *Lectures on the Science of Joint Campaigns* [联合战役学教程], (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2012), 201-202; Mark Cozad, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on Hotspots along China’s Maritime Periphery, 9, <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Cozad%20Testimony.pdf>.

⁶⁹⁵ John Chen, “Choosing the ‘Least Bad Option’: Organizational Interests and Change in the PLA Ground Forces,” in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders et al., (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 106-108.

⁶⁹⁶ Dennis Blasko, “PLA Ground Forces Lessons Learned: Experience and Theory,” in *The Lessons of History: The Chinese People’s Liberation Army at 75*, eds. Laurie Burkitt, Andrew Scobell, and Larry M. Wortzel, (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2003), 77; Dennis J. Blasko, “The Biggest Loser in Chinese Military Reforms,” in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, eds. Phillip C. Saunders et al., (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 356, 360, 368-369.

⁶⁹⁷ Liu Zhen, “China’s military gives glimpse of updated long-range rocket system,” *South China Morning Post*, January 9, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3117044/chinas-military-gives-glimpse-updated->

Marine Corps competency, and conventional precision strike is similarly a core PLARF competency.⁶⁹⁸ The PLAGF's development of redundant capabilities and bureaucratic jockeying to lead a joint amphibious invasion or joint firepower strike campaign magnifies the degree to which a joint Taiwan campaign will depend on the PLAGF's competencies or fail on its weaknesses.

The PLAGF's organizational resistance against reforms toward a joint warfighting capability and against reforms toward a mechanized force translate the service's weaknesses into operational vulnerabilities that threaten the prospect of a Taiwan campaign. Unification with Taiwan has since the founding of the People's Republic been a critical policy objective over which the CCP has repeatedly threatened war.⁶⁹⁹ In 2005, the PRC National People's Congress promulgated the Anti-Secession Law, which declared that "accomplishing the great task of reunifying the motherland is the sacred duty of all Chinese people."⁷⁰⁰ Unification with Taiwan, by force if necessary, is a clear top-level priority the CCP has held for decades. By contrast, Hu Jintao only declared becoming a maritime great power to be a CCP objective in 2012. Given the unyielding and paramount importance of the Taiwan issue to the CCP, PLAGF operational inability to perform its role in a joint Taiwan campaign may force the PLA to reinforce it from the center with additional resources and CMC support at the expense of PLAN far seas operations and other missions unrelated to a joint Taiwan campaign.

long-range-rocket-system.

⁶⁹⁸ Dennis J. Blasko and Roderick Lee, "The Chinese Navy's Marine Corps, Part 1: Expansion and Reorganization," *China Brief*, February 1, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-chinese-navys-marine-corps-part-1-expansion-and-reorganization/>; Michael S. Chase, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on China's Military Reforms and Modernization: Implications for the United States, February 15, 2018, 1-2, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT400/CT489/RAND_CT489.pdf.

⁶⁹⁹ PRC Embassy in the United States, "White Paper--The Taiwan Question and Reunification of China," August 1993, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/twwt/White%20Papers/t36704.htm>; PRC Embassy in the United States, "White Paper--The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue," February 21, 2000, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/twwt/White%20Papers/t36705.htm>.

⁷⁰⁰ "完成统一祖国的大业是包括台湾同胞在内的全中国人民的神圣职责。" PRC National People's Congress, "Anti-Secession Law" [反分裂国家法], March 14, 2005, http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/gongbao/2005-05/08/content_5341734.htm.

VII. Case Study: Southeast Asia and the South China Sea

The following section includes a case study considering how the CCP attempts to erode U.S. strategic influence in a critical maritime theater: the South China Sea. This thesis does not argue that the CCP's maritime transformation and resultant sea power is the only or determinative variable in any changes to U.S. strategic influence in the South China Sea; everywhere they arise, influence and alignment are nebulous entities with many causes. This case study demonstrates that aspects of CCP sea power are mobilized in a broader service of reordering regional and global security architecture, the necessary precondition of achieving national rejuvenation. Moreover, it demonstrates how exertions of sea power which fall below the level of outright military competition upends U.S. strategic influence and so undermines U.S. military primacy.

South China Sea

For the same reasons that maritime chokepoints on China's eastern and western peripheries make up Asia's decisive terrain, islands and partially submerged reefs in the South China Sea constitute the disputed sea's decisive terrain: whoever controls these features can station land-based assets on them to monitor and extend threats over the surrounding waters and airspace. The PRC is in effective control over two major groups of South China Sea features—the Paracel Islands and the Spratly Islands—which it has subsequently militarized. Outposts at Mischief Reef, Subi Reef, Fiery Cross Reef, and Woody Island currently feature hardened airbases, anti-ship missiles, anti-surface missiles, radar and sensor arrays, and jamming platforms which cover much of the PRC's maritime claims in the South China Sea.⁷⁰¹

⁷⁰¹ Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "Chinese Power Projection Capabilities in the South China Sea," Center for Strategic and International Studies, accessed January 17, 2021, <https://amti.csis.org/chinese-power-projection/>; Gregory B. Poling, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on China's Military Power Projection and U.S. National Interests, February 20, 2020, 3, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Poling_Written%20Testimony.pdf. For a detailed analysis of military platforms stationed on these South China Sea features, see J. Michael Dahm's *South China Sea Military Capabilities Series*, J. Michael Dahm, "Introduction to South China Sea Military Capability Studies," Johns Hopkins University Applied

PLA militarization of decisive terrain within the Nine Dash Line does not extend to a final important feature: Scarborough Shoal. The group of islets, some 300nm east of the Paracel Islands and nearly 465nm away from Hainan Island, is only 120nm off the shore of Luzon, the main Philippine island. Analysts from the United States and Japan have referred to Scarborough Shoal, in conjunction with the Paracel and Spratly Island groups, as a “strategic triangle” (see Map 5) positioning the PLAN to complicate U.S. and Japanese operations in the South China Sea, potentially by exercising sea control over SLOCs that run through the CCP’s “nine-dash line” maritime claims in the South China Sea.⁷⁰² Greg Poling and Zack Cooper observe that PLA assets stationed on Scarborough Shoal, if similar to those on the Paracel or Spratly Islands, would extend PLAN power projection and ISR capabilities over the main Philippine islands, where U.S. military personnel and assets are positioned.⁷⁰³

Physics Laboratory, 2020, <https://www.jhuapl.edu/Content/documents/IntroductiontoSCSMILCAPStudies.pdf>.

⁷⁰² Yoji Koda, “Japan’s Perceptions of and Interests in the South China Sea,” *Asia Policy* 21, January 20, 2016, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/japans-perceptions-of-and-interests-in-the-south-china-sea/>; Sasakawa USA, “Scarborough Shoal key to strategic triangle of disputed territories within South China Sea,” June 7, 2016, <https://spfusa.org/spfusa-news/scarborough-shoal-key-strategic-triangle-disputed-territories-within-south-china-sea/>; Joel Wuthnow, “Beyond Imposing Costs: Recalibrating U.S. Strategy in the South China Sea,” *Asia Policy* 24, July 2017, 123-138, 129, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26403211>.

⁷⁰³ Gregory Poling and Zack Cooper, “Developing a Scarborough Contingency Plan,” Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, March 30, 2016, <https://amti.csis.org/developing-scarborough-contingency-plan/>.

Map 5: The South China Sea



Source: Kōda Yōji, "Confronting China's Island-Building Campaign," nippon.com, August 11, 2015, <https://www.nippon.com/en/currents/d00190/>.

Disputes over Scarborough Shoal, 2012-2018

Events at Scarborough Shoal between 2012 and 2018 demonstrate how the CCP employed its growing naval and paranaul capacity in conjunction with economic tools to undermine U.S. alliance cohesion. By provoking a paranaul conflict with the Philippines and resolving it with economic benefits while the USG remained myopically focused on South China Sea island militarization, the CCP approach to Scarborough Shoal strained the U.S.-Philippines alliance.

With its proximity to Luzon, Scarborough Shoal sits easily within the Philippines' 200nm exclusive economic zone and continental shelf claims but is claimed as sovereign territory by both the PRC and the Philippines.⁷⁰⁴ The legal dispute escalated into a tense standoff on April

⁷⁰⁴ Mark E. Rosen, "Philippine Claims in the South China Sea: A Legal Analysis," CNA, August 2014, 9-14, https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/iop-2014-u-008435.pdf.

10, 2012, when Philippine frigate BRP *Gregorio del Pilar* enforced the Philippines' claims to the islet group by boarding and preparing to arrest Chinese fishermen operating by Scarborough Shoal; the fishermen issued a distress call and drew two unarmed China Maritime Surveillance vessels with the charge to protect the PRC's "maritime rights and interests," a priority codified into law under Jiang Zemin and continually reaffirmed by every subsequent CCP General Secretary, at the islet group. These developments began the standoff of PRC and Philippine government vessels.⁷⁰⁵

U.S. diplomacy likely played a role in precipitating this standoff. Beginning in 2010, the USG began a concerted diplomatic campaign to embolden Southeast Asian countries against CCP provocations in the South China Sea. In July 2010, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum to urge compliance with UNCLOS in settling South China Sea sovereignty disputes and encouraged all parties to reach a code of conduct, becoming at that time the highest-level U.S. official to publicly express a position on the South China Sea.⁷⁰⁶ The following year, the United States indicated its increased attention to the region with a presidential tour, in which President Obama became the first U.S. President to attend the East Asia Summit with the leaders of Southeast Asian countries one day after he announced that "the United States is turning our attention to the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region" in an address to the Australian Parliament.⁷⁰⁷ The USG matched its rhetoric with varied capacity-building efforts for Southeast Asian countries,

⁷⁰⁵ *Xinhua*, "Chinese patrol ship reaches Huangyan Island after dispute," April 20, 2012, <http://english.sina.com/china/p/2012/0420/460266.html>; Michael Green et al., "Counter-Coercion Series: Scarborough Shoal Standoff," *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, May 22, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-scarborough-standoff/>.

⁷⁰⁶ U.S. Department of State, "Remarks at Press Availability," July 23, 2010, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2010/07/145095.htm>; M. Taylor Fravel, "Threading the Needle: The South China Sea Disputes and U.S.-China Relations" in *Strategic Adjustment and the Rise of China: Power and Politics in East Asia*, eds. Robert S. Ross & Øystein Tunsjø, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 237.

⁷⁰⁷ Barack Obama, speech, Australian Parliament, November 17, 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>; Association of Southeast Asian Nations, "Joint Statement of the 3rd ASEAN-U.S. Leaders' Meeting," November 18, 2011, <https://asean.org/joint-statement-of-the-3rd-asean-us-leaders-meeting-2/>.

including the sale of a U.S. Coast Guard cutter to the Philippines, inducted into the latter's navy as BRP *Gregorio del Pilar*.⁷⁰⁸ Taylor Fravel observed, "given U.S. diplomacy in previous months, Manila may have concluded that it would be backed by the United States if it challenged China," or that challenging the PRC may have been a way to "elicit even more direct intervention from the United States."⁷⁰⁹

This USG support almost certainly emboldened Philippine action in the 2012 standoff with PRC vessels at Scarborough Shoal. On April 26, Philippines Secretary of Foreign Affairs Albert del Rosario responded to a PRC threat not to "internationalize" the dispute by telling reporters, "we are going to the United States in order to be able to maximize the benefits derived out of this mutual defense treaty."⁷¹⁰ Researchers from the Center for Strategic and International Studies found that the PRC began building up its presence at the standoff shortly after, deploying an additional ship to Scarborough Shoal on April 28 and steadily increasing to a peak of 14 vessels standing off against the Philippines' 5 by April 30.⁷¹¹ In private, Philippine officials began "seeking clarity" on which circumstances would trigger U.S. military intervention under the U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty signed in 1951.⁷¹²

Despite its interest in empowering Southeast Asian countries to check PRC behavior in the South China Sea, the Obama Administration was unwilling to do so directly, including in

⁷⁰⁸ Jim Gomez, "Philippines launches new navy ship, a retired U.S. Coast Guard cutter," *Honolulu Star Advertiser*, January 17, 2021, <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2011/12/14/breaking-news/philippines-launches-new-navy-ship-a-retired-u-s-coast-guard-cutter/>.

⁷⁰⁹ M. Taylor Fravel, "Threading the Needle: The South China Sea Disputes and U.S.-China Relations" in *Strategic Adjustment and the Rise of China: Power and Politics in East Asia*, eds. Robert S. Ross & Øystein Tunsjø, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 243.

⁷¹⁰ Zhang Yunbi and Qiu Quanlin, "Manila's attempt to internationalize dispute rejected," *China Daily*, April 19, 2012, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-04/19/content_15084608.htm; *Agence France-Presse*, "Philippines seeks US defense boost amid China row," April 26, 2012, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/34841/philippines-seeks-us-defense-boost-amid-china-row>.

⁷¹¹ Michael Green et al., "Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence," May 2017, 109-110, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/170505_GreenM_CounteringCoercionAsia_Web.pdf.

⁷¹² Ann Jung, "ASEAN and the South China Sea," *National Bureau of Asian Research*, July 16, 2012, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/asean-and-the-south-china-sea-deepening-divisions/>; Ely Ratner, "Learning the Lessons of Scarborough Reef," November 21, 2013, <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/learning-the-lessons-scarborough-reef-9442>.

defense of a treaty ally. Rather than activating the Mutual Defense Treaty to assist the Philippines, the Obama Administration sought to tie the dispute to the South China Sea's lack of a collectively-supported Code of Conduct agreement and encouraged ASEAN members to find ways to make progress in the ongoing Code of Conduct negotiations.⁷¹³ In the service of these negotiations, President Obama did not publicly clarify the U.S. position on circumstances which trigger U.S. military support under the Mutual Defense Treaty during a June joint press conference with Philippines President Benigno Aquino III. Instead, he returned to the importance of having "a strong set of international norms and rules governing maritime disputes in the region."⁷¹⁴

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell reportedly brokered an agreement with Chinese officials for a mutual withdrawal to end the standoff over Scarborough Shoal in June 2012.⁷¹⁵ This narrative has been contested from various sources, not least because, for unconfirmed reasons, the Chinese vessels did not complete their withdrawal after the Philippine vessels left, effectively establishing PRC administrative control over Scarborough Shoal.⁷¹⁶

While public knowledge of the Obama Administration's decision-making process around Scarborough Shoal remains incomplete, one factor appeared to be President Obama's disinterest in competing against the CCP for strategic influence. In a 2014 joint statement with President Aquino, Obama used the language of CCP propagandists to declare, "we welcome

⁷¹³ Josh Rogin, "Inside America's quiet diplomacy on the South China Sea," *Foreign Policy*, June 8, 2012, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/06/08/inside-americas-quiet-diplomacy-on-the-south-china-sea/>.

⁷¹⁴ Mark Landler, "Obama Expresses Support for Philippines in China Rift," *New York Times*, June 8, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/09/world/asia/obama-shows-support-for-philippines-in-china-standoff.html>; Jojo Malig, "Will the US defend Philippines if China attacks?" *ABS-CBN News*, July 25, 2012, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/-depth/07/25/12/will-us-defend-philippines-if-china-attacks>.

⁷¹⁵ Geoff Dyer, "US strategists face dilemma over Beijing claim in South China Sea," *Financial Times*, July 9, 2014, <https://www.ft.com/content/b2176dea-0732-11e4-81c6-00144feab7de>.

⁷¹⁶ Michael Green et al., "Counter-Coercion Series: Scarborough Shoal Standoff," *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, May 22, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-scarborough-standoff/>; Peter Lee, "South China Sea dispute: Rewriting the history of Scarborough Shoal," *Asia Times*, April 16, 2016, <https://asiatimes.com/2016/04/south-china-sea-dispute-rewriting-the-history-of-scarborough-shoal/>.

China's peaceful rise...our goal is not to counter China. Our goal is not to contain China."⁷¹⁷ Far from seeing PRC activities at Scarborough Shoal as challenging the U.S. security guarantee to the Philippines, President Obama recorded in his memoirs that the PRC's behavior would only thicken U.S. alliances: "The one thing [the United States] had going for us was that in recent years China had started overplaying its hand...[by] threatening the Philippines and Vietnam over control of a handful of small but strategic islands in the South China Sea. U.S. diplomats reported a growing resentment toward such heavy-handed tactics—and a desire for a more sustained American presence as a counterweight to Chinese power."⁷¹⁸ President Aquino affirmed this perspective in 2014 by signing the U.S.-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, a new vehicle by which the U.S. military could rotate forces through bases in the Philippines on a nonpermanent basis.⁷¹⁹ To the Obama Administration, the CCP's use of its growing maritime paramilitary appeared to bolster U.S. strategic influence.

To Southeast Asian countries, however, the United States' threshold for responding to incidents in the region appeared to leave significant space for Chinese coercive economic dominance over the region, giving rise to a "two Asias" dichotomy defined by a "security Asia" in which the United States remains the security partner of choice and an "economic Asia" dominated by the Chinese market.⁷²⁰ The CCP's enforcement of its maritime rights and interests around Scarborough Shoal had economic impacts: after seizing the islet group from Philippine

⁷¹⁷ U.S. White House, "Remarks by President Obama and President Benigno Aquino III of the Philippines in Joint Press Conference," April 28, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/28/remarks-president-obama-and-president-benigno-aquino-iii-philippines-joi>.

⁷¹⁸ Barack Obama, *A Promised Land*, (New York: Crown, 2020), 476.

⁷¹⁹ U.S. Embassy in the Philippines, "Signing of Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement," April 28, 2014, <https://ph.usembassy.gov/signing-enhanced-defense-cooperation-agreement/>.

⁷²⁰ Evan A. Feigenbaum and Robert A. Manning, "A Tale of Two Asias," *Foreign Policy*, October 31, 2012, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/10/31/a-tale-of-two-asias/>; Wang Dong, "Two Asias? China's Rise, Dual Structure, and the Alliance System in East Asia," in *Strategic Adjustment and the Rise of China: Power and Politics in East Asia*, eds. Robert S. Ross and Øystein Tunsjø, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 100-136. A recent RAND Corporation report finds this dichotomy persists throughout Southeast Asia, with respondents from Southeast Asian countries reporting strong economic dependence and opportunity with the PRC parallel to stronger military cooperation and willingness to grow that cooperation with the United States. Bonny Lin et al., *Regional Responses to U.S.-China Competition in the Indo-Pacific: Study Overview and Conclusions*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2020), ix, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4412.html.

administration, Chinese-erected barriers and CCG patrols denied Philippines fishermen entry to Scarborough Shoal's inner lagoon, which is rich with fish stocks.⁷²¹ Denial of access to these fish stocks increased economic pressure on Philippines fishermen and became an important issue for Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte, elected in 2016.⁷²² Unlike President Aquino, who was a reliable U.S. ally, President Duterte navigated the "two Asias" by triangulating between the PRC and United States and distanced Philippine policy from the United States to secure the comparatively greater marginal benefits of thicker ties with the PRC.⁷²³

The change in Philippines policy toward the United States and the PRC is not defined entirely by Duterte's unconventional personality. Manila's shift also indicates the inherent limitations in a U.S. security guarantee that does not extend to coercive gray zone actions that undermine economic, in this case fishing, security. By the time of Duterte's election, Asia-Pacific interdependence through Chinese markets had reached sovereignty-eroding levels.⁷²⁴ For example, a 2017 poll in Indonesia found 32 percent of Indonesians believed the benefits of Chinese investment outweigh potential threats to sovereignty following reports that Chinese hackers attempted to manipulate an Indonesian national election.⁷²⁵ Philippines public opinion

⁷²¹ Michaela Del Callar, "DFA: China boats blocking PHL vessels from Panatag Shoal," *GMA News Online*, July 18, 2012, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/265889/dfa-china-boats-blocking-phl-vessels-from-panatag-shoal/story/>; *ABS-CBN News*, "3 Chinese ships seen in Scarborough – PCG," September 12, 2012, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/nation/regions/09/12/12/3-chinese-ships-seen-scarborough-pcg>; Martin Petty, "Exclusive: At strategic shoal, China asserts power through control, and concessions," *Reuters*, April 9, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-china-philippines-exclu/exclusive-at-strategic-shoal-china-asserts-power-through-control-and-concessions-idUSKBN17B124>.

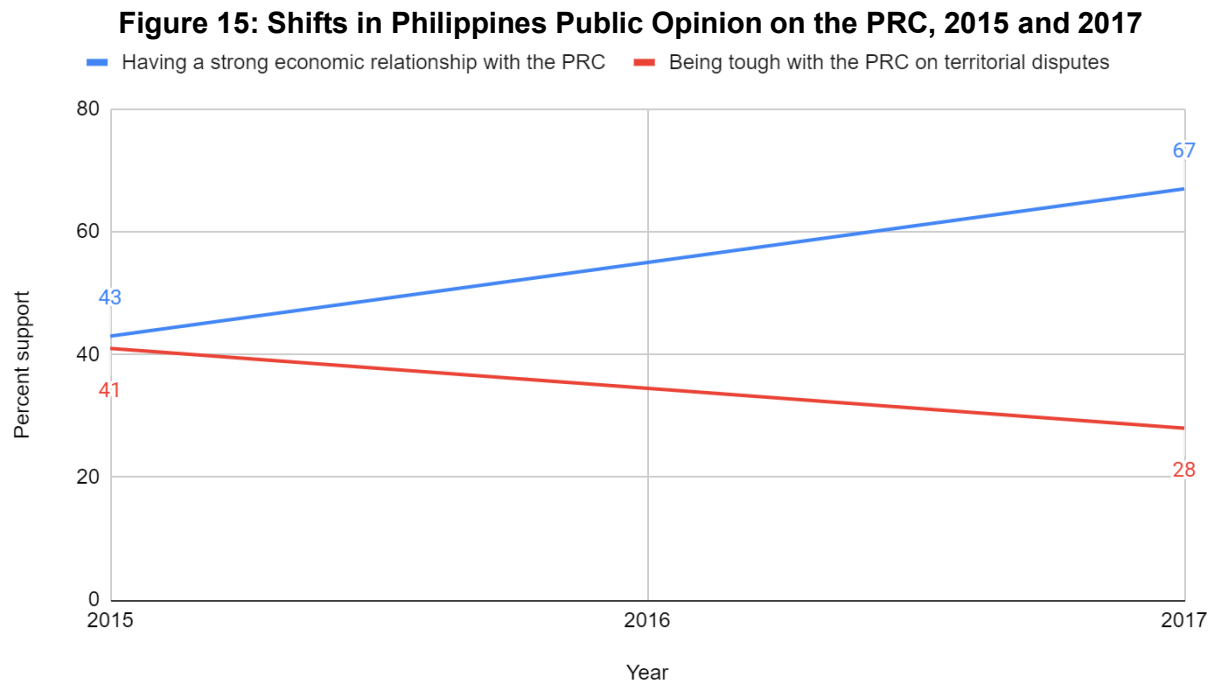
⁷²² Roli Ng, Manuel Mogato, "Philippine fishermen favor strong president to end China's blockade," *Reuters*, May 5, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-election-southchinasea/philippine-fishermen-favor-strong-president-to-end-chinas-blockade-idUSKCN0XW2HB>; Pia Ranada, "Duterte and Xi talked about fishing rights in Scarborough Shoal," *Rappler*, October 23, 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/duterte-brought-up-fishing-rights-china-xi>.

⁷²³ Ben Blanchard, "Duterte aligns Philippines with China, says U.S. has lost," October 20, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-philippines/duterte-aligns-philippines-with-china-says-u-s-has-lost-idUSKCN12K0AS>; Bill Ide, "Duterte Announces Philippine 'Separation' from US," *VOA News*, October 20, 2016, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/duterte-announces-philippine-separation-us>; Richard C. Paddock, "Rodrigo Duterte, Pushing Split With U.S., Counters Philippines' Deep Ties," *New York Times*, October 26, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/27/world/asia/philippines-duterte-united-states-alliance.html>.

⁷²⁴ Joseph Chinyong Liow, "Southeast Asia and Sino-U.S. Competition: Between a Rock and a Hard Place," in *Strategic Asia 2020: U.S.-China Competition for Global Influence*, eds. Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills, (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2020), 216.

⁷²⁵ Ibid 231, footnote 32.

followed a similar course. In 2015, 43 percent of respondents to a Pew Research poll supported having a strong economic relationship with the PRC while 41 percent instead supported being tough with the PRC on territorial disputes; by 2017, these figures were 67 percent and 28 percent, respectively.⁷²⁶



Sources: Jacob Pushter and Caldwell Bishop, “People in the Philippines Still Favor U.S. Over China, but Gap Is Narrowing” Pew Research Center, September 21, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2017/09/21/people-in-the-philippines-still-favor-u-s-over-china-but-gap-is-narrowing/>.

With Rodrigo Duterte leading the Philippines, the CCP had an opportunity to benefit from a two-track effort on the South China Sea by pushing Manila in “security Asia” and inviting them in “economic Asia.” Whether or not the CCP did so intentionally, in 2016 the CCP managed to drive a wedge further in the U.S.-Philippines relationship by conceding on inflated demands in “security Asia” while proving a tough but engaged negotiating partner for the Philippines on economic issues. Since the CCP’s seizure of Scarborough Shoal in 2012, U.S. analysts had

⁷²⁶ Jacob Pushter and Caldwell Bishop, “People in the Philippines Still Favor U.S. Over China, but Gap Is Narrowing” Pew Research Center, September 21, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2017/09/21/people-in-the-philippines-still-favor-u-s-over-china-but-gap-is-narrowing/>.

been exceptionally concerned about the possibility the CCP may militarize the islet group.⁷²⁷ In 2015, the Obama administration began to publicize its FON program in response to Chinese militarization on Spratly Islands.⁷²⁸ In March 2016, President Obama was reported to have successfully warned General Secretary Xi Jinping away from militarizing Scarborough Shoal as well.⁷²⁹ In the Fall of 2016, the CCP appeared to ignore Obama's reported warnings by positioning ships capable of conducting artificial island building operations near Scarborough Shoal, which in the cases of Paracel and Spratly features preceded militarization.⁷³⁰ This provocation was well-timed; Duterte was scheduled to meet Xi for the first time shortly afterward. In that meeting, the two leaders agreed to manage any disputes in the South China Sea bilaterally, a thinly-veiled reference to excluding U.S. engagement in the South China Sea.⁷³¹ Immediately after this visit, Duterte announces a new policy of "separation" from the United States and increased alignment with the PRC.⁷³² As an apparently-unannounced part of the two leaders' agreement, Filipino fishermen were now permitted to access fish stocks at Scarborough Shoal.⁷³³ Regional expert Ashley Townshend described this development as a "diplomatic masterstroke" in which the CCP built leverage from its 2012 seizure of Scarborough Shoal and subsequent threats to militarize it, then offered a pause in its provocative behavior as

⁷²⁷ Robert Klipper, "Why China Might Seek to Occupy Scarborough Shoal," *The Diplomat*, March 29, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/03/why-china-might-seek-to-occupy-scarborough-shoal/>.

⁷²⁸ Michael Green, Bonnie Glaser, and Gregory Poling, "The U.S. Asserts Freedom of Navigation in the South China Sea," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, October 27, 2015, <https://amti.csis.org/the-u-s-asserts-freedom-of-navigation-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

⁷²⁹ Demetri Sevastopulo, Geoff Dyer, and Tom Mitchell, "Obama forced Xi to back down over South China Sea dispute," *Financial Times*, July 12, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/c63264a4-47f1-11e6-8d68-72e9211e86ab?siteedition=intl#axzz4JeHY7fh7>.

⁷³⁰ Katie Hunt and Kathy Quiano, "South China Sea: China building more islands?" *CNN*, September 8, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/09/08/asia/south-china-sea-scarborough-shoal-philippines-china/index.html>.

⁷³¹ *BBC News*, "Duterte in China: Xi lauds 'milestone' Duterte visit," October 20, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37700409>.

⁷³² Ben Blanchard, "Duterte aligns Philippines with China, says U.S. has lost," October 20, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-philippines/duterte-aligns-philippines-with-china-says-u-s-has-lost-idUSKCN12K0AS>; Bill Ide, "Duterte Announces Philippine 'Separation' from US," *VOA News*, October 20, 2016, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/duterte-announces-philippine-separation-us>; Richard C. Paddock, "Rodrigo Duterte, Pushing Split With U.S., Counters Philippines' Deep Ties," *New York Times*, October 26, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/27/world/asia/philippines-duterte-united-states-alliance.html>.

⁷³³ Gabriel Cardinosa, "Filipino fishermen back from Panatag Shoal with big catch," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 30, 2016, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/148316/filipino-fishermen-back-from-panatag-shoal-with-big-catch>.

a concession to entice Duterte to reduce Philippine alignment with the United States.⁷³⁴ In so doing, the CCP also reinforced to Manila that bilateral diplomacy on Beijing's terms yields results, while attempting to involve the United States ended with the loss of Scarborough Shoal.⁷³⁵

Beijing's agreement with Manila granting access for fishermen to the lagoon in Scarborough Shoal traded transient concessions for enduring benefits. Strong U.S.-Philippines military alignment, signaled by the USG's "pivot to Asia," the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, and President Obama's specific warning about militarizing South China Sea islands and Scarborough Shoal indicated the CCP may be exposed to military costs from the allied forces if it built military facilities on Scarborough Shoal. Granting Philippine fishermen access to the lagoon necessarily precluded the island-construction operations needed to build a military outpost on the islet group, likely assuaging U.S. concerns. But regional expert Bill Hayton observes, "China's policy in the South China Sea is akin to a ratchet. It moves forward, sometimes takes a break but never moves backwards," further explaining that administrative steps the PRC took in 2020 clearly indicated an enduring CCP intent to occupy Scarborough Shoal.⁷³⁶ Beijing's agreement with Manila in 2016 was not an abandonment of the CCP's long-held interest in completing its control over the South China Sea's decisive terrain by occupying and militarizing Scarborough Shoal; rather, the agreement was a bid to delay such occupation in order to weaken U.S.-Philippines alignment in an effort to create future, more permissive conditions.⁷³⁷ The CCP used nonmilitary aspects of sea power, in this case flexible

⁷³⁴ Ashley Townshend, "Duterte deal with China over Scarborough Shoal exposes US failure," *CNN*, October 31, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/10/31/opinions/philippines-china-us-scarborough-shoal-south-china-sea/index.html>.

⁷³⁵ The latter is likely to be an enduring, though not necessarily decisive aspect of U.S.-Philippine relations in the future. Current Philippines Secretary of Foreign Affairs Teodoro Locsin Jr. is among a hardline group of Filipinos who continue to blame the United States for the Philippines' loss of Scarborough Shoal in 2012. Dona Z. Pazzibugan, "Locsin blames US for loss of Panatag shoal to China," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, January 28, 2020, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/184585/locsin-blames-us-for-loss-of-panatag-shoal-to-china>.

⁷³⁶ Bill Hayton, written testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on U.S.-China Relations in 2020: Enduring Problems and Emerging Challenges, September 9, 2020, 2 & 4, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-09/Hayton_Testimony.pdf.

⁷³⁷ Jane Perlez, "Prospect of Philippine Thaw Slows China's Plans in South China Sea," *The New York Times*,

interpretations of its maritime rights and interests enforced by a robust paranaul force, while the USG remained strictly focused on the potential naval power of militarized islands. As a result, the CCP weakened U.S. strategic influence over Manila and furthered its objective of reordering the Indo-Pacific security architecture.

CCP success is indicated by shifts in Manila's behavior toward USG-CCP disagreements on maritime policy. On January 17, 2018, the USS *Hopper*, an *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyer in the U.S. Navy, sailed within twelve nautical miles of Scarborough Shoal. The PRC Foreign Ministry called the transit a violation of Beijing's sovereignty and sparked a monthlong diplomatic pressure campaign ultimately once again weakening the USG alliance with the Philippines.⁷³⁸

Five days after the *Hopper's* transit, Chinese state media outlet *The People's Daily* ran a column under the "Zhong Sheng" [钟声] byline, which generally indicates a column reflects the official CCP position on international matters.⁷³⁹ Zhong Sheng called the *Hopper's* transit a destabilizing action that will escalate tensions in the South China Sea and force the PRC to improve unspecified capabilities in the theater.⁷⁴⁰ Although the Zhong Sheng article was textually ambiguous, its threat was a clear extension of existing Chinese military policy: in 2016, PLAN Admiral and Deputy Chief of the PLA General Staff Sun Jianguo [孙建国] warned that military transits in the South China Sea "could even play out in a disastrous way," and that the PLA "can play a decisive role in the last moment to defend our national sovereignty and interests."⁷⁴¹

September 24, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/25/world/asia/philippines-south-china-sea.html>.

⁷³⁸ David Stanway, Idrees Ali, David Brunnstrom, and Martin Petty, "China says U.S. warship violated its South China Sea sovereignty," *Reuters*, January 20, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-us-sovereignty/china-says-u-s-warship-violated-its-south-china-sea-sovereignty-idUSKBN1F9088>.

⁷³⁹ David Bandurski, "Trump and Xi: Are Things Getting Personal?," *China Media Project*, May 14, 2019, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2019/05/14/trump-and-xi-are-things-getting-personal/>.

⁷⁴⁰ Zhong Sheng [钟声], "Damaging South China Sea Stability is Ignorant" [破坏南海稳定是不识时务的妄动], *The People's Daily*, January 22, 2018, <http://qh.people.com.cn/n2/2018/0122/c182753-31167096.html>.

⁷⁴¹ Ben Blanchard, "Freedom of navigation patrols may end 'in disaster': Chinese admiral," *Reuters*, July 18, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-ruling/freedom-of-navigation-patrols-may-end-in-disaster-chinese->

Speaking on the same day the Zhong Sheng article was published, a Manila palace spokesperson was careful to create distance with the U.S. and minimize distance with the PRC in its response, calling the issue “America’s problem” while maintaining that the PRC continues to operate in “good faith” in the South China Sea.⁷⁴² On February 12, 2018, Manila announced a delegation from the PRC Foreign Ministry will meet representatives from the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs to discuss “contentious issues concerning the South China Sea.”⁷⁴³ The same announcement specified that the dialogue would constitute the second meeting through the bilateral consultation mechanism on the South China Sea, which was formed in January 2017, hosted first bilateral meeting on May 19, 2017, and for which a second meeting was initially planned for late 2017.⁷⁴⁴ The two parties released a joint statement on February 13 in line with Zhong Sheng’s criticisms of the United States: Manila and Beijing agree to “exercise self-restraint” over South China Sea activities that “would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability.”⁷⁴⁵ Later that year, Philippine Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana questioned the U.S.-Philippine alliance’s utility and whether it constitutes a meaningful security guarantee; if not, Lorenzana suggested Manila may “scrap it.”⁷⁴⁶

admiral-idUSKCN0ZY0FJ.

⁷⁴² Jelly Musico, “Palace hands off China-US row in WPS,” *Philippine News Agency*, January 22, 2018.

<https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1022411>; “‘Not our problem’: Palace washes hands of China-US warship tiff,” *ABS-CBN News*, January 21, 2018, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/01/21/18/not-our-problem-palace-washes-hands-of-china-us-warship-tiff>.

⁷⁴³ Philippines Presidential Communications Operations Office, “Palace announces PH-China bilateral consultation mechanism in Manila,” February 12, 2018, https://pcoo.gov.ph/news_releases/palace-announces-ph-china-bilateral-consultation-mechanism-manila/.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid; Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs, “Joint Press Release for the First Meeting of the Philippines-China Bilateral Consultation Mechanism on the South China Sea,” <https://dfa.gov.ph/newsroom/dfa-releasesupdate/12694-joint-press-release-for-the-first-meeting-of-the-philippines-china-bilateral-consultation-mechanism-on-the-south-china-sea>; “China, Philippines confirm twice-yearly bilateral consultation mechanism on South China Sea,” *Xinhua*, May 19, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/19/c_136299206.htm.

⁷⁴⁵ Joyce Ann L. Rocamora, “PH, China agree on restraint vs. activities that complicate sea row,” *Philippine News Agency*, February 13, 2018, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1025144>.

⁷⁴⁶ Eimor P. Santos, “DND eyes review of Mutual Defense Treaty with U.S.,” *CNN Philippines*, December 20, 2018, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2018/12/20/Philippines-U.S.-Mutual-Defense-Treaty-South-China-Sea-dispute.html>; Jelly Musico, “Lorenzana orders review of 67-year-old US-PH military pact,” *Philippine News Agency*, December 28, 2018, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1057639>.

The U.S. naval transit was a strategically unhelpful action that gave the PRC an opportunity to express outrage, which the Philippines mollified by thickening diplomatic ties with the PRC at enduring cost to U.S.-Philippine alliance cohesion.

Consequences of Diminishing Strategic Influence in Southeast Asia

Developments in the U.S.-Philippine alliance are mirrored throughout the region. In December 2019, CCG vessels began harassing Malaysian drillship *West Capella* in response to a Malaysian submission to the United Nations that month extending its continental shelf and exclusive economic zone claims.⁷⁴⁷ The Chinese deployment began a months-long standoff that did not end until the Royal Malaysian Navy dispatched a destroyer and the CCG vessels withdrew. The CCP reinitiated this standoff in April by dispatching a survey ship, the *Haiyang Dizhi Bahao*, with a CCG and maritime militia escort occupying waters near the drillship and within Malaysia's new claims under the guise of conducting a survey.⁷⁴⁸ The CCP's persistent coercion won results: when the USG launched a sustained presence operation by the *West Capella* to check the Chinese presence, the Malaysian foreign ministry criticized warship activities in the region generally as raising tensions and undermining regional stability, a tacit rebuke delivered immediately after the introduction of U.S. military presence yet noticeably absent throughout the CCG harassment episode.⁷⁴⁹ Chinese vessels did not withdraw until May

⁷⁴⁷ United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, "Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) Outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles from the baselines: Submissions to the Commission: Partial Submission by Malaysia in the South China Sea," June 19, 2020, https://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/submission_mys_12_12_2019.html; United Nations, "Malaysia Partial Submission to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf pursuant to Article 76, paragraph 8 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 in the South China Sea," December 12, 2019, https://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/mys85_2019/20171128_MYS_ES_DOC_001_secured.pdf.

⁷⁴⁸ Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "Update: Chinese Survey Ship Escalates Three-Way Standoff," May 18, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/chinese-survey-ship-escalates-three-way-standoff/>.

⁷⁴⁹ Blake Herzinger, "Learning in the South China Sea: The U.S. Response to the West Capella Standoff," *War on the Rocks*, May 18, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/05/learning-in-the-south-china-sea-the-u-s-response-to-the-west-capella-standoff/>; Euan Graham, "U.S. Naval Standoff With China Fails to Reassure Regional Allies," *Foreign Policy*, May 4, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/04/malaysia-south-china-sea-us-navy-drillship-standoff/>; Dato' Sri Hishammuddin Hussein, "Press Statement: South China Sea," April 23, 2020, https://www.kln.gov.my/web/guest/home/-/asset_publisher/latest/content/press-statement-on-south-china-sea-by-yb-dato-seri-hishammuddin-tun-hussein-minister-of-foreign-affairs-wisma-putra-23-april-2020.

15, in which the standoff was apparently resolved following a call between Chinese defense minister Wei Fenghe and Malaysian defense minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob and after a public statement from the Malaysian defense ministry expressing “gratitude to the medical aid sponsored by China” and “mutual interest” in South China Sea stability, with no indication that the standoff had occurred.⁷⁵⁰

Such hedging and growing alignment with—or deference to—the PRC⁷⁵¹ is pervasive in ASEAN member country statements and policy. Following the release of the U.S. Department of Defense’s *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* in 2019, ASEAN published an “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” noting that “geopolitical and geostrategic shifts” have pervaded the Indo-Pacific in recent years, further noting that “the rise of material powers, i.e. economic and military, requires avoiding the deepening of mistrust, miscalculation, and patterns of behavior based on a zero-sum game.”⁷⁵² Describing geopolitical competition as a “zero-sum game” is in line with CCP framing of the USG-CCP competition wherein the USG is attempting to be the sole winner in a game of power politics while the PRC opts for “win-win cooperation.”⁷⁵³ ASEAN policy in implementation reflects this effort to hedge between the U.S. and the PRC, for example by simultaneously agreeing to participate in separate joint military exercises.⁷⁵⁴

The inability of the USG to realize its policy goals in the South China Sea similarly indicates diminishing U.S. strategic influence in Southeast Asia as pertains to the South China

⁷⁵⁰ Drake Long, “Chinese Survey Ship Leaves Malaysian Waters After Pressure Campaign,” *Radio Free Asia*, May 15, 2020, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/southchinasea-malaysia-survey-05152020184540.html>.

⁷⁵¹ Chinese influence in Southeast Asia, while growing, is reflective of a regional hedging posture which gives the CCP room to expand rather than an unyielding regional march toward a Sino-centric order. The role of regional hedging on USG-CCP competition is discussed later in this section. For a discussion of Southeast Asian trends toward regionalism rather than Sino-centrism, see Carla Freeman, “The New Asia,” *Focus Asia*, February 2021, 3, <https://www.isdp.eu/content/uploads/2021/02/New-Asia-FA-C.-Freeman-22.02.21.pdf>.

⁷⁵² Association of Southeast Asian Nations, “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific,” June 23, 2019, <https://www.asean2019.go.th/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/9b827363bebb08565c9da0dbb1188828-1.pdf>.

⁷⁵³ Wei Fenghe, “Speech at the 18th Shangri-La Dialogue by Gen. Wei Fenghe, State Councilor and Minister of National Defense, PRC” June 2, 2019, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/focus/2019-06/02/content_4842880.htm.

⁷⁵⁴ Lee Jeong-ho, “Asean steers between two powers with joint US military exercise in South China Sea,” *South China Morning Post*, September 7, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3026092/asean-steers-between-two-powers-joint-us-military-exercise>.

Sea. Michael McDevitt summarized U.S. policy objectives toward the South China Sea as including the following:

1. No use of force or coercion by any of the claimants to resolve sovereignty disputes or change the status-quo of disputed South China Sea features.
2. Freedom of navigation, which includes unimpeded lawful navigation for commercial, private and military vessels and aircraft. Coastal states must respect the UNCLOS language that all “high seas freedoms,” including peaceful military operations, are applicable in the EEZs of coastal states.
3. All maritime entitlements to any of the waters of the South China Sea must be based on international law and must be derived from land features in the South China Sea. China’s nine-dash line does not meet these criteria. In short, only land (islands and rocks) generates maritime zones, not vice versa.
4. The United States takes no position on the relative merits of competing sovereignty claims. It does not choose sides; nor does it favor one country’s claim over another’s.
5. An effective Code of Conduct that would promote a rules-based framework for managing and regulating the behavior of relevant countries in the South China Sea is essential. A key part of such a document would be mechanisms such as hotlines and emergency procedures for preventing incidents in sensitive areas and managing them when they do occur in ways that prevent disputes from escalating.
6. The United States supports internationally recognized dispute resolution mechanisms, including those provided for in the UNCLOS treaty.
7. Washington will respond positively to small South China Sea littoral countries that are U.S. allies, officially designated “strategic partners,” or “comprehensive partners,” who want to improve their ability to patrol and monitor their own territorial waters and EEZs.
8. The U.S. government wants to improve access for U.S. military in areas proximate to the South China Sea.⁷⁵⁵

U.S. policy has been largely unsuccessful in realizing these outcomes, in large part due to the USG’s inability to mobilize the collective action of ASEAN countries to deny the CCP’s maritime coercion or secure a behavioral Code of Conduct for the South China Sea. USG inactivity in the 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident sacrificed the first three, sixth, and seventh items McDevitt lists in favor of the fourth and fifth. Arguably, the Philippines’ and Malaysia’s responses to U.S. military operations in 2018 and 2019 suggest negative trends for the eighth item as well. The priorities that the USG did defend throughout the Scarborough episode—

⁷⁵⁵ Michael McDevitt, “The South China Sea: Assessing U.S. Policy and Options for the Future,” CNA, November 2014, iv-vi, https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/iop-2014-u-009109.pdf.

neutrality on claims and endorsement of a Code of Conduct—have been subsequently abandoned or stalled, perhaps indefinitely.⁷⁵⁶

What progress has been made toward regional balancing has been without apparent USG leadership. Between 2019 and continuing into 2020, South China Sea claimant states began issuing diplomatic notes at the United Nations aligning their national positions with an international tribunal's 2016 ruling that in part rejected the CCP's claim to "historic rights" in the South China Sea; the United States publicly aligned its position with the tribunal ruling months after the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia did.⁷⁵⁷ Even Southeast Asian countries' appeals to U.S. military presence despite PRC pressure serves primarily to hedge against PRC domination over both "economic Asia" and "security Asia" without securing the USG's position in USG-CCP competition; predictably for peacetime, countries in Southeast Asia generally value the PRC's economic influence over the USG's security influence.⁷⁵⁸

The USG's inability to gain preponderant influence in Southeast Asian countries sufficient to align them against a PRC security threat has high-end kinetic consequences which bear themselves out in peacetime behaviors. The U.S. military is heavily dependent on forward operating bases in allied countries to conduct operations in East Asia and needs options for expansion in order to maintain a combat-credible military threat in the event a high-end kinetic conflict arises with the PLA within the first island chain. As shown in Table 5 and Map 6, the U.S. military is overwhelmingly dependent on bases in Japan for power projection on China's

⁷⁵⁶ Michael R. Pompeo, "U.S. Position on Maritime Claims in the South China Sea," U.S. Department of State, July 13, 2020, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-position-on-maritime-claims-in-the-south-china-sea//index.html>; Eimor Santos, "Negotiations for South China Sea Code of Conduct a 'failed process,' expert says," *CNN Philippines*, April 15, 2020, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/4/15/south-china-sea-code-of-conduct-negotiations.html>.

⁷⁵⁷ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020, 360-361, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/2020_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf; Nguyen Hong Thao, "South China Sea: The Battle of the Diplomatic Notes Continues," *The Diplomat*, August 4, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/south-china-sea-the-battle-of-the-diplomatic-notes-continues/>.

⁷⁵⁸ Drake Long, "Three ASEAN States Push Back on Beijing in South China Sea," *Radio Free Asia*, April 15, 2020, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/southchinasea-challenge-04152020152316.html>; *Radio Free Asia*, "Philippines Foreign Minister Challenges 'China's Demand' on South China Sea," September 21, 2020, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/challenges-09212020150449.html>; Bonny Lin et al., "U.S. Versus Chinese Powers of Persuasion," *RAND Corporation*, 2020, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10137.html.

periphery.⁷⁵⁹ A 2017 study found the PLARF was at that point able to strike every fixed headquarters and logistical base, strike every U.S. ship in port in Japan, crater every runway and runway-length taxiway on major U.S. airbases in Japan, and destroy more than 200 U.S. aircraft on the ground in a pre-emptive strike on U.S. forces.⁷⁶⁰ This study likely dramatically underestimates the PLA's potential destructive firepower insofar as the USG has since revealed that the PLA has approximately 350 road-mobile MRBM and IRBM launchers, not the estimate of 100-125 MRBM launchers and zero IRBM launchers DOD publicly announced in 2016.⁷⁶¹ In the event of a high-end kinetic conflict in East Asia between the U.S. military and the PLA, the PLARF's precision strike capabilities will likely force the U.S. military to prosecute the conflict in part from bases which do not yet exist.

Table 5: U.S. Military Footprint in the Western Pacific

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF STATIONED U.S. SERVICEMEN
AUSTRALIA	1,500
JAPAN	55,600
PHILIPPINES	200
SINGAPORE	200
SOUTH KOREA	28,500
THAILAND	300
U.S. (GUAM)	8,150

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2020*, (London: Routledge, 2020), 58-60.

To present a more robust basing infrastructure, the U.S. military's ability to posture combat-credible forces in East Asia depends on the active agreement of allies and partners to accept a greater U.S. troop presence and host combat systems able to threaten the PLA. On the former, current treaty allies Thailand and the Philippines have become increasingly

⁷⁵⁹ The U.S. has a sizeable military footprint in South Korea as well, but these are overwhelmingly U.S. Army forces not trained, equipped, or authorized for a maritime confrontation with the PLA.

⁷⁶⁰ Thomas Shugart and Javier Gonzalez, "First Strike: China's Missile Threat to U.S. Bases in Asia," *Center for a New American Security*, 2017, 13, <https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/CNASReport-FirstStrike-Final.pdf>.

⁷⁶¹ U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2016," April 26, 2016, 109, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2016%20China%20Military%20Power%20Report.pdf>.

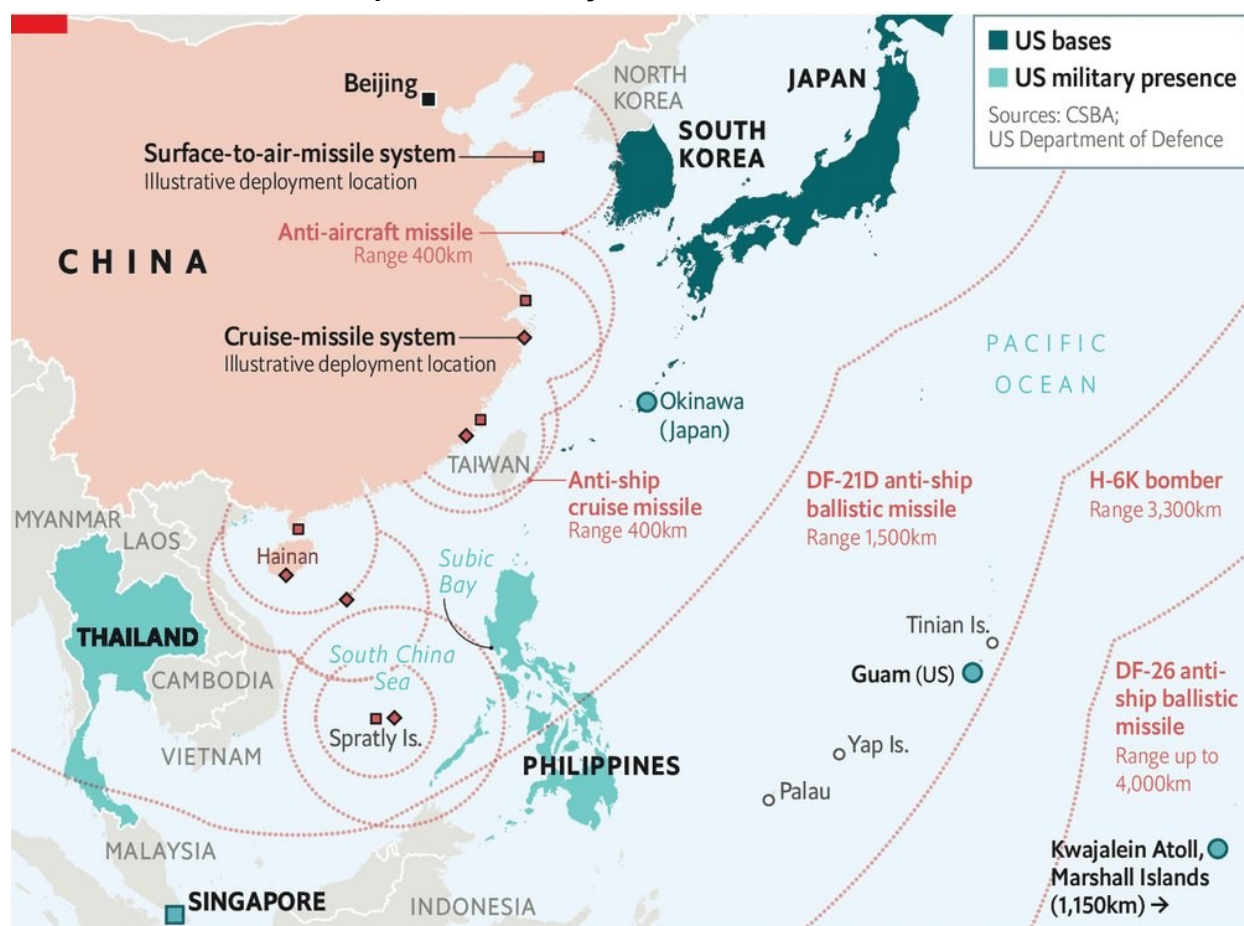
disinclined to host U.S. forces, with President Duterte motioning to terminate the Visiting Forces Agreement authority for stationing U.S. forces in-country.⁷⁶² On the latter, even Japan has been reluctant to host new U.S. platforms, particularly land-based MRBM and IRBMs that can threaten the Chinese mainland.⁷⁶³ While the Freely Associated States, a grouping of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau with which the USG has current military agreements through signed Compacts of Free Association, has indicated interest in hosting a larger U.S. military footprint, the closest island remains over a thousand nautical miles from Japan and are more useful for flowing forces to the theater than for hosting forward operations.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁶² Lian Buan, "Duterte dangles VFA for US-made vaccine: 'No vaccine, get out'," *Rappler*, December 26, 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/duterte-dangles-vfa-us-made-vaccine-december-2020>; Zachary Abuza, "America Should Be Realistic About its Alliance with Thailand," *War on the Rocks*, January 2, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/01/america-should-be-realistic-about-its-alliance-with-thailand/>.

⁷⁶³ Shannon Bugos, "Japan Downplays Possibility of Hosting INF-Range Missiles," *Arms Control Association*, December 2019, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2019-12/news-briefs/japan-downplays-possibility-hosting-inf-range-missiles>; Jesse Johnson, "The U.S. wants Japan's help to close its 'missile gap' with China. Is Tokyo up for it?" *The Japan Times*, August 25, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/08/25/national/politics-diplomacy/u-s-wants-japans-help-close-missile-gap-china-tokyo/>; Mike Yeo, "Japan suspends Aegis Ashore deployment, pointing to cost and technical issues," *Defense News*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2020/06/15/japan-suspends-aegis-ashore-deployment-pointing-to-cost-and-technical-issues/>.

⁷⁶⁴ On Micronesia's and Palau's interest in hosting U.S. bases, see Tommy Remengasu Jr., "Pacific defense pact renewal vital to the US amid rising tension with China," *The Hill*, May 17, 2019, <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/444291-pacific-defense-pact-renewal-vital-to-the-us-amid-rising>; Ben Kesling, "U.S. Military Refocuses on Pacific to Counter Chinese Ambitions," *Wall Street Journal*, April 3, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-military-refocuses-on-pacific-to-counter-chinese-ambitions-11554292920>. On the utility of bases in the Freely Associated States for a high-end kinetic conflict with the PLA, see Matt Tuzel, "Making the Case for Increased US Basing in the Pacific," *The Diplomat*, November 28, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/11/making-the-case-for-increased-us-basing-in-the-pacific/>.

Map 6: U.S. Military Presence in the Pacific



The Economist

Source: *The Economist*, "America's top brass responds to the threat of China in the Pacific," March 7, 2021, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2021/03/07/americas-top-brass-responds-to-the-threat-of-china-in-the-pacific>.

The USG is losing the contest for influence over Southeast Asia in the South China Sea. As the CCP leverages economic and paranaul assets to circumvent international agreements by operating below the threshold the USG determines justifies U.S. military intervention, Southeast Asian countries are increasingly forced to hedge between the U.S. and CCP. To hedge is not to be indecisive; a Southeast Asia that hedges between the United States and the CCP is one resolved against expanding U.S. security cooperation at the expense of PRC

economic engagement or vice versa. Even U.S. allies and partners decisively triangulate their interests between “economic Asia” and “security Asia.”⁷⁶⁵

By situating the policy implementation trends within an established framework of the CCP’s intentions, the net assessment approach systematically examines the PRC’s actions in the South China Sea in strategic terms. Other leading explanations for why the CCP pursues sea power, including naval nationalism, protecting trade, and survival, are overly focused on whether the PLA develops high-end naval warfighting capabilities able to defend China’s shores or secure its supply lines. As a result, these explanations give insufficient attention to the peacetime implications of the CCP’s sea forces. This case study describes the CCP’s peacetime maritime operations, occurring under the shadow of the PLAN, and the ways it undermines U.S. strategic influence while managing escalation to avoid high-end military competition.

As described in Sections IV and V, the USG and CCP have asymmetric objectives which make ASEAN’s hedging enough for CCP success. The CCP does not have publicly stated objectives to establish primacy in the region, nor should U.S. policy be commended for Southeast Asia’s hedging. The CCP’s stated policy is the rise of a multipolar order with a tacit acknowledgment that, in a multipolar system, the PRC would by default be a regional economic and military hegemon that enjoys the privileges of such.⁷⁶⁶ The U.S. foreign policy objective is to maintain regional primacy by denying Chinese military expansion in the South China Sea, in part by mobilizing and aligning regional allies and partners around that objective.⁷⁶⁷ If the USG

⁷⁶⁵ In a 2020 survey of Southeast Asian political elites, nearly 80% of respondents answered that, in a U.S.-PRC rivalry, ASEAN should “enhance ASEAN resilience and unity” or “not [side] with China or the US,” with only 3.1 percent preferring to choose a side in the competition. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute ASEAN Studies Centre, “The State of Southeast Asia: 2020 Survey Report,” January 16, 2020, 5, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/TheStateofSEASurveyReport_2020.pdf.

⁷⁶⁶ Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.” Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. October 18, 2017
http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf.

⁷⁶⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019, 16, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF->

successfully rallies its partners to this cause, it succeeds; if it does not, and regional opinion is equivocal, then it fails. While it is the USG's objective to succeed, the CCP need only not fail.⁷⁶⁸

VIII. Alternative Futures

How CCP efforts at maritime transformation develop and the threat it will pose to the United States from 2021 to 2049 leaves significant room for uncertainty. As an effort to bound that uncertainty, this section presents four alternative future scenarios of the likely “pace and intensity of long-term competition” against a given adversary.⁷⁶⁹ This section modifies a framework developed by experts at the RAND Corporation to account for the identified trends in the CCP's maritime transformation. Rather than make decisive predictions on whether trends in CCP maritime transformation as described in Section VI are enduring or not, this section offers four representative scenarios covering a range of potential permutations should the identified trends be accelerated, maintained, slowed, or reversed altogether.

The bulk of this thesis has accumulated the pieces available to conduct a threat assessment of CCP maritime transformation. Section IV argued that the CCP is undergoing a maritime transformation amid a broader competition against the United States with an objective to reorder the global superstructure and aggrandize itself while removing obstacles such as the U.S.-led security architecture. Section V argued that the USG objective is to maintain its military primacy in part by drawing on the current security architecture to preserve its freedom of maritime access, or freedom of the seas. Section VI identified five key trends that shape the potency of CCP maritime transformation and sharpen the threat it poses to USG interests: 1) diminishing returns on Chinese fixed-asset investment, 2) consolidating PRC commercial power

DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF.

⁷⁶⁸ For a compelling examination of the merits of a strategy of “not losing,” see Jacqueline E. Whitt, “In Defense of A Strategy of Not-Losing,” *The Strategy Bridge*, July 23, 2020, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2020/7/23/in-defense-of-a-strategy-of-not-losing>.

⁷⁶⁹ James G. Roche and Thomas G. Mahnken, “What is Net Assessment?” in *Net Assessment and Military Strategy: Retrospective and Prospective Essays*, ed. Thomas G. Mahnken, (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2020), 20.

at western maritime chokepoints, 3) ongoing PLAN surface fleet modernization, 4) an outgrowth of PLAN aviation, and 5) continued PLAGF service dominance and resistance to CCP-directed reforms. Section VII offered a case study in how some of the CCP's maritime developments have already been used to weaken U.S. strategic influence over its allies and partners.

This section considers how potential trajectories in the trends identified in Section VI affect the CCP's ability to achieve its objectives described in Section IV at the cost of USG objectives as described in Section V. To do so, it makes use of a RAND framework led by Andrew Scobell to summarize four scenarios as ideal types⁷⁷⁰ of what the CCP and its instruments of power will look like in 2049. The four scenarios RAND considers are as follows:

1. *A triumphant China*, in which Beijing is remarkably successful in realizing its grand strategy;
2. *An ascendant China*, in which Beijing is successful in achieving many but not all of the goals of its grand strategy;
3. *A stagnant China*, in which Beijing has failed to achieve its long-term goals; and
4. *An imploding China*, in which Beijing is besieged by a multitude of problems that threaten the very existence of the CCP-PLA-PRC.⁷⁷¹

As Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping have posited, the success of CCP maritime transformation is an important component of realizing CCP grand strategy. A successful maritime transformation is to continue or accelerate the commercial maritime and naval trends building CCP sea power (e.g., trends 2-4) while arresting or reversing the trends which restrict maritime transformation (e.g., trends 1 and 5). Table 6 summarizes how degrees of success in CCP maritime transformation map to degrees of its success in realizing its grand strategy, aligning with the four scenarios RAND developed. The table also characterizes the probability and magnitude of

⁷⁷⁰ The purpose of alternative futures analyses is not to make overspecified predictions for policy to rigidly follow. Rather, it is to set initial future conditions different enough from present forecasts in order to capture a range of feasible futures for which the USG can flexibly plan. A larger number of alternative scenarios capturing detailed nuances, while potentially interesting, is not useful for defense planning. See Jeffrey S. McKittrick, "Analytical Tools and Techniques" in *Net Assessment and Military Strategy: Retrospective and Prospective Essays*, ed. Thomas G. Mahnken (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2020), 208-209.

⁷⁷¹ Andrew Scobell et al., *China's Grand Strategy: Trends, Trajectories, and Long-Term Competition*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2020), 103.

likely conflict between the CCP's maritime transformation and USG interests⁷⁷² before offering an assessment of CCP maritime power⁷⁷³ and the projected outcome of CCP maritime transformation under each scenario.

⁷⁷² A gray zone scenario in which U.S. interests are threatened by the high probability of low-magnitude conflict, for example, has a different character altogether from a scenario with a high probability of medium-magnitude conflict, such as the onset of limited war, or a scenario with a low probability of high-magnitude conflict, such as a pre-emptive nuclear strike on the United States, its allies, or USG personnel and assets deployed abroad.

⁷⁷³ Maritime power in these circumstances is weighed in whether the CCP is able to establish sea control and/or sea denial, and in which areas. In the given scenarios, the CCP is able to establish sea control or sea denial globally, regionally through the Indo-Pacific, or locally in China's near seas.

Table 6: Alternative Scenarios for CCP Maritime Transformation in 2049

		Triumphant CCP	Ascendant CCP	Stagnant CCP	Imploding CCP
Characteristics	<i>Likelihood</i>	Less likely	More likely	More likely	Less likely
	<i>Conditions (RAND summary)⁷⁷⁴</i>	PRC becomes world's largest economy and an innovation leader. PLA is modern, capable, and has global reach.	PRC becomes strongest Asian power with sustained economic and innovative growth but is not dominant. PLA has robust regional reach.	Economic downturn, significant social discontent in PRC. PLA has slowly growing capabilities.	CCP domestic control eroded. PLA preoccupied with internal functions.
	<i>Conflict with USG (probability/magnitude)</i>	High/High	High/Medium	Medium/Medium	Low/High
	<i>CCP maritime power</i>	Global contest for sea control	Regional sea denial, local sea control	Regional sea denial	Local sea denial
Trends	<i>Outcome of CCP maritime transformation</i>	CCP successfully transitions to a new economic growth model, overcomes PLAGF interests to implement reforms, and develops sufficient joint expeditionary capacity to seize sea control in theaters far from China's shores. MSRI investments in strategic strongpoints gives rise to a network of overseas naval bases. Very High threat.	PRC finds partial success in new econ. growth models but does not entirely root out entrenched PLAGF interests. Development of joint capabilities continues but does not reach objectives as envisioned; PLA formidable but not a "world-class military." Improved PLA can secure sea control near China and position sea denial capabilities globally. More countries give CCP strategic strongpoints through MSRI, but most do not permit them to be converted to full military bases. High threat.	Substantial shift toward PAP/ PLAGF, away from overseas interests. In econ. downturn, CCP still tries to rely on investment-based growth to little avail due to overcapacity. PLAN is maintained but carrier program is halted due to massive costs of building and maintaining nuclear powered vessels. Inadequate investment in PLAN aviation undermines even regional sea control capabilities. Cheaper shore-based PLARF and PLAN/paranaval forces maintain sea denial capabilities. Moderate threat.	CCP faces a sequence of black swan catastrophes making it unable to compete internationally. The PLA, including the PLARF's stockpile of ballistic missiles and launchers, are not well-maintained, posing challenges to current regional sea denial capabilities. Primary threat to the United States is low-likelihood high-magnitude risk of a nuclear event. Variable threat.
	<i>Diminishing economic growth</i>	Reversed	Slowed	Maintained	Accelerated
	<i>Commercial power at maritime chokepoints</i>	Accelerated	Maintained	Slowed	Reversed
	<i>PLAN modernization</i>	Accelerated	Slowed	Slowed	Reversed
	<i>Outgrowth of PLAN aviation</i>	Accelerated	Slowed	Slowed	Reversed
	<i>PLAGF dominance, resistance to reform</i>	Reversed	Maintained	Accelerated/ Maintained	Accelerated/ Maintained

⁷⁷⁴ Andrew Scobell et al., *China's Grand Strategy: Trends, Trajectories, and Long-Term Competition*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2020), 104.

Scenario 1: Triumphant CCP

The most optimistic scenario for the CCP is, along with the most pessimistic scenario, the least likely. In this scenario, the CCP succeeds in all major lines of effort deriving from its grand, maritime, and military strategies, succeeded in finding new drivers of economic growth, and is able to effectively convert power across all dimensions into strategic influence at the expense of the United States. The CCP's success validates its competitive approach against the USG and positions it extremely well to hold USG interests at risk in waters near and far from China's shores. The probability of conflict with the USG and likely magnitude of this conflict are both high, posing a very high threat to U.S. interests. The CCP's successful maritime transformation poses a high threat to the USG-led global security architecture.

As a political baseline, this scenario requires stability for CCP rule for the next thirty years. Prerequisites for such include transfers of power between CCP paramount leaders without significant, publicly visible power struggles and the successful and sustained pacification, by whatever means, of frontier provinces with non-Han ethnic majorities: Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia. To realize the grand strategy of national rejuvenation, the CCP will also need to have successfully annexed Taiwan, by conquest if necessary.⁷⁷⁵ Costs of domestic security maintenance have grown at a sustainable rate or have declined as currently emerging technologies by which the CCP will pervade Chinese civil society becomes more affordable and are deployed at scale.

CCP economic successes in this scenario drive strategic success. In this scenario, the CCP successfully transitions away from investment-led economic growth to identify a new growth model and implements a disciplined approach to managing the PRC economy during crises. These developments successfully reverse the current trend of diminishing economic

⁷⁷⁵ *BBC News*, "Xi Jinping says Taiwan 'must and will be' reunited with China," January 2, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-46733174>.

growth for the PRC and end the proclivity of CCP officials to inflate growth figures with overinvestment.

Increasing economic growth rates have three second-order effects for maritime transformation. First, they bolster the range and depth of MSRI investment, giving the CCP significant breadth of international port surveillance and potential cyberattacking capability. Second, a steadily growing Chinese economy indicates a steadily growing PLA budget, accelerating ongoing naval shipbuilding programs, including the development of nuclear aircraft carriers fielding advanced carrier aviation. Finally, the demonstrated reality of the CCP's accelerating economic growth underpins the CCP's Marxist claim to a greater role in international leadership.

Taken together, these three products of rising economic growth rates are likely to expand the range of PLAN power. As the PLAN conducts more mil-mil engagements with MSRI countries receiving significant port investments, the CCP is likely to expand its network of commercial "strategic strongpoints," with several strongpoints becoming overseas PLA bases outright. CCP successes extends the maritime competition to theaters beyond the Indo-Pacific. Europe, Africa, and South Asia become integrated into the CCP's overseas security architecture, and traditional U.S. allies in the regions, facing local pressures, will have more incentive to hedge between the USG and CCP. The PLA's ability to station ASBMs and parts of its growing navy at overseas bases will extend the PLA's model of sea denial to distant theaters, potentially culminating in a global sea denial capability. Expeditionary fleets stationed at forward PLAN bases will be positioned to exert sea control where U.S. military presence, particularly sea denial capability, is limited.

In addition to reversing the trend of diminishing economic growth rates, a triumphant CCP would successfully transition from a ground-centric force to an expeditionary joint force by fully implementing the PLA reforms Xi Jinping announced in 2015 and uprooting entrenched PLAGF bureaucratic actors. The PLAGF becomes a leaner, modernized army able to effectively act as

the ground component of a joint military, and the CCP is sufficiently confident in PLAGF-led joint operations, such as those in a forced Taiwan unification scenario, with no deficiencies that would distract from the PLAN's expeditionary mission set. By clearing PLAGF obstructions to the trajectory of military development, the PLA abandons its land-sea integrated approach to military activities and actively seeks a global presence with forces that need not radiate from the Chinese mainland. The PLAN thus enjoys elite CCP backing to become a world-class, blue-water navy with a largely expeditionary mission set.

While the U.S. Navy continues to focus its attention on the First and Second Island Chains, its eroding margin of military superiority weakens U.S. treaty alliances with the Philippines, Thailand, and South Korea. Given rising pressure from the PLA and the strategic application of Chinese investment, these alliances may end altogether. In deference to the changing regional balance, Singapore begins drawing down some of its mil-mil interactions with the United States, and ASEAN breaks its balance between the United States and PRC when scheduling joint military exercises. While the U.S. may be able to increase its military footprint further from the theater in Guam and along the FAS islands, the CCP's restrictions on maritime access and continued efforts to foster a less permissive maritime environment will impose mounting costs on, and eventually effectively suspend, the U.S. military's ability to operate with impunity in peacetime within the First Island Chain.

Scenario 2: Ascendant CCP

The second scenario, more likely than the first or fourth, is one in which the CCP continues to accrue power but does not resolve its structural limitations or enduring proclivities. In this scenario, the CCP's accrual of resources and capabilities makes it the dominant power in continental Asia and China's near seas, but its power recedes along a gradient stretching out to the reaches of the Indo-Pacific. While the CCP remains focused on its longstanding objectives of national rejuvenation and neutralizing obstacles such as U.S. global influence, slowing

economic growth and persistent resistance to PLA reform restrain the CCP's competitive capabilities. Conflict with the USG is just as likely as under the Triumphant CCP scenario, but the CCP's recognized economic and military reform limitations will lead to a lower standard to which the PLA will calibrate its prosecution of conflict. With a high likelihood of moderate-intensity conflict, the CCP's maritime transformation will pose a high threat to U.S. interests.

Like under the Triumphant CCP scenario, the Ascendant CCP scenario requires that the CCP's hold on power remain secure, including the succession of paramount leaders after Xi Jinping without significant, publicly visible power struggles. Unlike the Triumphant CCP scenario, perceived domestic unrest in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia—and cross-Strait tensions with Taiwan—need not be definitively resolved so long as the costs of stability maintenance and the PLA's cross-Strait military posture do not grow to consume budgets or manpower that CCP leaders intend for other programs.

While the CCP in this scenario does not find and fully realign itself to a new economic growth model that continues Chinese economic growth in the past decades, the PRC economy still benefits from enough new financial and technological innovations to slow its decline. Central CCP authorities restrain the proclivity of provincial officials to continue feeding overinvestment, though the proclivity persists and becomes less well-managed during economic crises. Notably, the slowing of PRC GDP growth, by some estimates to between 2.7% and 4.2% in 2049, still indicates decades of robust, if not mold-breaking, growth.⁷⁷⁶

With moderately increasing stability maintenance expenditures and slowing economic growth, the CCP's expenditures on its commercial and military maritime transformation efforts is likely to slow and transition from investment to operations. The PLA budget, likely to track the

⁷⁷⁶ David Dollar, Yiping Huang, and Yang Yao, "China 2049: Economic Challenges of a Rising Global Power," *Brookings Institution*, January 2020, 7, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/FP_20200106_china_2049_dollar_huang_yao.pdf. By comparison, U.S. GDP growth since 1990 averaged 2.46%. See The World Bank, "GDP growth (annual %) – United States," accessed February 15, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2019&locations=US&start=1990&view=chart>.

PRC's GDP, will have falling growth rates unable to sustain the explosive growth of PLAN shipbuilding demonstrated from 2000 through 2020. The resources for current naval shipbuilding programs will be slowly diverted to the PLAN's burgeoning costs for ship maintenance and recapitalization. The CCP will similarly commit to fewer new MSRI investments as the costs of maintaining current MSRI projects grow. While the CCP may make the investments necessary to convert some flagship strategic strongpoints, such as the Gwadar Port, into overseas PLA bases, the financial incentives available to do so or to create new strategic strongpoints along the MSRI will need to be selectively deployed.

While neither the PLAN nor its network of commercial strategic strongpoints will be adequately resourced to grow into globally dominant forces, their continued growth offers significant sea denial capabilities through much of the Indo-Pacific and a limited sea control capability in China's near seas. The PLAN will still be the largest navy in the world, and it will still have access to a network of strategic strongpoints and limited options for forward operating bases in Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean Region, and East African countries. While the PLA is unlikely to have adequate basing to seize sea control in these waters, it will have the capability to intimidate Indo-Pacific countries weighing security cooperation agreements with the United States and to execute dangerous maneuvers that threaten U.S. Navy ships operating in the Indian Ocean. These capabilities harden in China's near seas, where the PLAN will face more robust pressure from the U.S. military positioned along the First and Second Island Chains, but the ever-expanding reach of the PLA's anti-ship missiles and expansive naval/paranaval presence disincentivize Southeast Asian countries from aligning further with the United States.

An Ascendant CCP will have completed its reforms to the PLA, building new joint warfighting capabilities and making progress toward balanced service interests, without successfully uprooting entrenched PLAGF leaders or the service's willingness to hold military-wide reform hostage to service interests. The PLAN will be a robust force hindered in budget battles and progress toward an expeditionary mission set by continentalist interests who

demand the PLA remain focused closer to China's borders. The PLAN's mission set and force structure will be tied to strategies emphasizing land-sea integration, in which the Chinese mainland serves as the necessary source of power and backstop for PLA operations.

As with a Triumphant CCP, the USG-CCP maritime competition in Southeast Asia is likely to tip in the CCP's favor, following the local balance of forces. With the U.S. military's margin of military superiority diminished or closed altogether, U.S. allies, particularly those interested in keeping USG-CCP maritime competition contained within the Indo-Pacific, may send military forces to conduct presence operations and insist on freedom of access. The United Kingdom, France, and Canada may conduct regular or semi-regular freedom of navigation operations near the First Island Chain. These will likely be performative gestures that do not indicate allied militaries will balance against the PLA in the South China Sea or Taiwan Strait, however, and the CCP's sea forces will be able to punish or deny access to waters within large parts of the First Island Chain to the U.S. military and its allies. Recognizing the shifting military balance, Southeast Asian countries will continue to hedge between the USG and CCP, with U.S. allies Thailand and the Philippines decreasing the volume of joint exercises and partners such as Singapore expanding defense cooperation with the CCP to match their engagements with the USG.

Scenario 3: Stagnant CCP

The third scenario, more likely than the first or the fourth, is one in which the CCP does not make needed adjustments to its economic and military policies. This scenario is primarily characterized by lethargic economic growth and the harsh limits of budgetary constraints on ongoing CCP lines of effort. Anemic growth and domestic instability force the CCP to turn its focus inward, suspending its focus on contesting global influence against the United States. Due to harsh budget limitations on PLAN and MSRI investments, neither the probability of maritime conflict with the USG nor its likely magnitude meaningfully increase between 2020 and 2049,

with both remaining at moderate levels. With a moderate likelihood of moderate-intensity conflict with the USG, CCP maritime transformation will pose moderate threats to U.S. interests.

The defining attribute of this scenario is the CCP's inability to find new models of economic growth and continued reliance on an investment-led growth model. Continued overinvestment will maintain the current trend of diminishing growth rates and poorly position the PRC to recover or respond to a major economic downturn, as experienced during the 2008 Global Financial Crisis or the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. In the event of another similar exogenous shock in the 2030s, the overinvested CCP will not be able to recover as rapidly as in the previous two. The PRC will suffer serious budget shortfalls, growing financial pressure for social welfare as jobs are lost, and diminished spending leading to anemic economic growth.

The absence of visible economic growth poses an existential threat to the CCP. The elite CCP narrative that robust economic growth is necessary to distract or appease the Chinese citizenry and ward off dissent will foster paranoid behaviors from political leaders hypersensitive to perceived popular unrest, even if the Chinese public does not demonstrate against the CCP.⁷⁷⁷ This hypersensitivity will exacerbate political fissures between the CCP elite that become publicly visible during important policy debates and leadership successions. If popular unrest does materialize in response to poor economic conditions, they will likely be compounded by general unrest in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia as well as worsening cross-Straits relations. The demands and costs of stability maintenance will significantly increase and begin consuming a greater share of budget, manpower, and CCP leader attentions. The PLAGF may be deployed to supplement PAP capacity in armed stability maintenance activities, again giving the PLAGF the most politically important mission sets of the services.

⁷⁷⁷ Andrew Scobell et al., *China's Grand Strategy: Trends, Trajectories, and Long-Term Competition*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2020), 104.

With rapidly falling economic growth rates, PLAN shipbuilding will need to be significantly curtailed, and spending on costly prestige platforms like on the aircraft carrier program will likely be suspended. Ship maintenance will likely suffer, and a small number of already-constructed warships may be scuttled to relieve maintenance and sustainment costs. Similarly, growth of Chinese investment along the MSRI will slow or actively recede, uprooting the commercial instruments of CCP influence in the Indian Ocean Region and Mediterranean. Where MSRI investments are maintained, the project's potential value as a strategic strongpoint will be in harsh competition with its value as a commercial port in which a Chinese company has ownership; with lax economic growth, the CCP may not readily risk the economic value of overseas investments by leveraging latent dual-use capabilities that may draw international ire. The CCP will operate an aging, potentially shrinking navy with limited naval aviation capacity along fewer potential seaports from which it can conduct military operations. Collectively, these factors will preclude the PLA from establishing a distant sea control capability.

A Stagnant CCP will be increasingly reliant on the PLAGF to maintain domestic stability and as such will be poorly positioned to uproot enduring PLAGF bureaucratic interests that contract the move toward joint warfighting capabilities. In fact, the CCP's interest in domestic stability will make it beholden to the PLAGF, restoring part of the service's influence lost from the reforms. With stagnant or shrinking defense budgets, the PLAGF's return to influence will come at the cost of other services, including the PLAN in terms of budget, manpower, and political investment in mission sets. In conjunction with the paranaval PAFMM, the PLAGF and PLARF will be able to maintain robust sea denial capabilities in China's near seas using anti-ship missile platforms that are comparatively cheaper than aircraft carriers or other prestige vessels.

Unlike the Triumphant or Ascendant CCP scenarios, a Stagnant CCP will find itself on the losing end of USG-CCP maritime competition in Southeast Asia. With the U.S. military's margin of superiority growing once again, CCP influence in the region that came at the cost of USG influence will begin transitioning back, with Southeast Asian countries becoming more receptive

to security cooperation activities with the United States and returning to a hedged posture. A Stagnant CCP is likely to face regional military competition against countries like Vietnam and the Philippines instead of fighting against the United States to win their alignment. The CCP will remain the largest economic and military power in the Asia-Pacific, but it will be more dependent on its neighbors to create a stable peaceful environment fostering peace and prosperity for the region.

Scenario 4: Imploding CCP

The fourth scenario is highly unlikely. Sustained social turmoil and an Imploding CCP forced to lurch from crisis to crisis is altogether unable to dedicate resources to international competition, with the United States or China's Southeast Asian neighbors. Maritime transformation, as well as the CCP's grand strategy involving competition and a national rejuvenation, will be abandoned.

An Imploding CCP faces a parade of black swan catastrophes: the PLA initiates and loses a war with a bordering country, the PRC faces a sudden collapse of its financial system, Sino-Soviet ties break down, persistent infighting and power struggles among CCP elites factionalizes the PLA, and persistent popular protests give way to anomie across the country. Demonstrations against the Party-government, especially in oppressed areas like Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia, could quickly become violent protests, then outright armed revolt.

The probability that the CCP orders military conflict against the USG, which would draw in a competitor when the CCP's hold on power is weak, is extremely low. However, a CCP with weakened or contested legitimacy may also not be in firm control of PLA activities. In this scenario, the USG would not be able to deter or compel the end of a military action through established diplomatic channels in Beijing. At the high end of the risk spectrum, this could lead to the mobilization of part of the PLA for major war led by a charismatic general or an

unauthorized nuclear strike. The CCP's primary threat to the United States in this scenario is this low-likelihood, high-magnitude risk of an unauthorized attack made possible by weak Party-state institutions.

IX. Implications for Policymakers and Conclusion

This thesis used a net assessment approach to align CCP capabilities with its intent over a span of decades to arrive at a characterization of the threat CCP maritime transformation poses to U.S. interests. While prior efforts to explain the CCP's bid for sea power tended to extrapolate CCP intentions from observed capabilities, an overemphasis on capabilities—particularly current capabilities—provides too narrow of an assessment to be useful for defense planning. In the most urgent cases, defense establishments require years if not decades to reshape a military in response to a new threat; after identifying a threat requiring change in military force structure, a defense establishment must procure new platforms, develop doctrine and train their servicemen for their use, and foster service cultures around the reshaped force. Transient developments, such as the rise of popular nationalism, are inadequate for assessing the threat posed by a state engaged in long-running competition. The net assessment framework takes a broad analytical approach that considers the dynamics a competition unfolding over time and considers capabilities as trends that advance or hinder a defense establishment's progress toward its enduring objectives. This section summarizes the thesis' net assessment of CCP maritime transformation and concludes with discrete findings from the assessment.

Review of the CCP's Maritime Transformation

The CCP's enduring grand strategic objective is realizing its national rejuvenation in opposition to a superpower rival state, in this case transforming the global order in opposition to the United States and its security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region. Becoming a “maritime

great power” is a secondary objective that CCP leaders believe is necessary but insufficient to realize national rejuvenation. The CCP’s maritime transformation was initiated and propelled forward by the activist foreign policy preferences of first Hu Jintao, then Xi Jinping as part of broader grand strategic shifts toward a greater international role for the PRC. For its part, the United States’ enduring objective has been military primacy, by which it denies potential competitors and secures the international status quo. Military primacy and deep engagement in the global status quo secure longstanding American interests, including freedom of the seas for U.S. civilian and military vessels.

Through maritime transformation, the CCP is developing sea power that is increasingly able to contest the United States’ erstwhile primacy and simultaneously threaten its Indo-Pacific security architecture. The Indo-Pacific’s largely maritime theater makes sea power a potent force in the USG-CCP strategic balance. Trends in the CCP’s maritime transformation collectively demonstrate an emerging maritime posture that undermines U.S. military primacy by extending sea denial capabilities throughout the Indo-Pacific and consolidating sea control capabilities in China’s near seas. Assessments of sea control and sea denial capabilities remain untested in peacetime, and the naval balance will likely shift over a long-running competition. Several operational asymmetries between the USG and CCP defense establishments serve as potential inflection points in the emergent trends of that competition.

The CCP has exerted sea power to stress the United States’ ties to its Indo-Pacific allies and partners. Because reordering China’s regional security environment in opposition to the U.S.-led security architecture is an important step toward national rejuvenation, the CCP’s maritime campaign against U.S. strategic influence is likely to intensify as it develops new capabilities. How this conflict will progress remains uncertain; although the CCP’s sea power is growing, CCP maritime transformation is also hindered by two negative trends reflecting structural weaknesses for which CCP leaders have not demonstrated an ability to arrest: a declining economic growth rate and robust continentalist interests in the PLA.

While I initially hypothesized that the CCP is building Mahanian sea power but struggled to do so because of ossified continentalist interests in the Party-state, my findings from this research did not strictly support this hypothesis. CCP maritime transformation is not on a course to sea power as Mahan understood it, in terms of overseas market access and naval battlefield command. Two important differences between the CCP's emerging sea power and Mahanian sea power emerge from this analysis. First, while Mahan emphasized decisive battles between concentrated battlefleets, the CCP's military and civilian assets both confer threat: CCP military doctrine emphasizes "residing the military within the civilian" to situate military capability and purpose within civilian resources, ensuring a maritime conflict will involve ostensibly private seaports and their civilian software as well as the PLAN's battlefleet.⁷⁷⁸ The use of civilian assets such as a maritime militia ostensibly composed of Chinese fishermen dramatically expands the geographic scope of modern maritime competition while lowering its intensity. Chinese sea power is a weapon for peacetime as well as wartime. Second, while Mahan—and subsequent U.S. naval tacticians—derided the "fortress fleet" which makes use of shore-based fire, modern technology has made it possible for the PLA to radiate significant striking power from the Chinese mainland into maritime theaters in the Indo-Pacific, reportedly with dangerous precision.⁷⁷⁹ This is not to say Mahan's theories of sea power are now obsolete; the CCP's interdomain approach to sea power continues to support the Mahanian concepts of national expansion through overseas markets. Rather, modern technology has rendered obsolete Mahan's approach to naval warfare despite the U.S. Navy's inherited "tendency to focus

⁷⁷⁸ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, (1890; reprint, New York: Dover, 1987), 138; Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), 271.

⁷⁷⁹ James R. Holmes, "A 'Fortress Fleet' for China," *The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* 11, no. 2, (2012), http://blogs.shu.edu/journalofdiplomacy/files/2012/05/009_Holmes_Layout-1a.pdf; Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), 246.

attention too readily on the big battle” without adequate engagement with land campaigns and control of the littoral seas.⁷⁸⁰

The net assessment approach’s focus on interaction between competing defense establishments clarifies the nature of these differences. Recognizing the civilian and interdomain characteristics of CCP sea power, USG national security and defense documents have acknowledged a need to develop new operational concepts in order to maintain a competitive advantage over the CCP; further, the USG has begun to seek options to emulate the PLA by establishing American land-based maritime strike capabilities in the theater.⁷⁸¹ The USG defense establishment’s response suggests that the CCP’s land-sea integrated approach to sea power converts an advantage vis-à-vis the USG despite the approach originating from a political compromise with ossified continentalist interests in the CCP.

Key Findings

Seven findings emerge from this net assessment.

- 1. There is no future in which CCP maritime transformation poses a low threat to U.S. interests.**

⁷⁸⁰ Wayne P. Hughes Jr. and Robert P. Girrier, *Fleet Tactics and Naval Operations* 3rd ed., (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 240.

⁷⁸¹ Lloyd J. Austin, “Message to the Force,” Memorandum to all Department of Defense Employees, March 4, 2021, 1, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Mar/04/2002593656/-1/-1/0/SECRETARY-LLOYD-J-AUSTIN-III-MESSAGE-TO-THE-FORCE.PDF>; U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge*, 2018, 7, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>; Terrence K. Kelley et al., “Employing Land-Based Anti-Ship Missiles in the Western Pacific,” *RAND Corporation*, 2013, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical_reports/TR1300/TR1321/RAND_TR1321.pdf; Ryo Nakamura, “US to build anti-China missile network along first island chain,” *Nikkei*, March 5, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Indo-Pacific/US-to-build-anti-China-missile-network-along-first-island-chain>.

Whether the CCP is triumphant, ascendant, stagnant, or imploding between 2020 and 2049, the CCP's maritime transformation will only increase the threat that regime poses to the USG and its interests. The threat a competitor poses is a factor of its capabilities and its intentions.⁷⁸²

The CCP's intention to use its growing power to the detriment of U.S. interests has been remarkably consistent. The CCP has maintained a grand strategy of national rejuvenation, varying defined, since the formation of the People's Republic in 1949. Since 1993, the CCP has considered the United States its primary adversary on the road to rejuvenation, and successive CCP leaders have maintained this assessment through the present day. While the CCP may modulate the tempo and intensity of their competitive activities in response to geopolitical or economic flux over time, in only one future scenario does the CCP turn from its march through U.S. interests toward national rejuvenation. An Imploding CCP faced with significant challenges to regime survival is most likely to forego policies of national rejuvenation and instead focus narrowly on survival. In this instance, CCP competitive intention poses little threat to the United States, but it is quickly displaced as a threat by the potential for failures of governance giving rise to activities undertaken by rogue military and paramilitary agents who may be armed with part of the CCP's nuclear arsenal. These or other threatening developments may just as likely not happen, but uncertainty over whether they will happen leaves threat conferred essentially unknowable in this scenario. The Imploding CCP scenario leaves plausible a wide range of potential outcomes and cannot be confidently designated as posing a low threat to the United States and its interests.

In Triumphant, Ascendant, and Stagnant CCP scenarios, the CCP's intention remains focused on national rejuvenation achieved by defeating the United States in a competition over the U.S.-led security architecture in the Indo-Pacific. The distinguishing factor in these three scenarios for the USG's threat calculus is their range of likely capabilities. In the Triumphant and

⁷⁸² Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, (1966 reprint, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 35.

Ascendant CCP scenarios, the CCP's maritime capabilities grow significantly, as surging economic growth rates fund continuations and expansions of programs to build sea power such as targeted MSRI investments and PLAN modernization. These programs will extend the PLA's sea denial capabilities and introduce a sea control capability, particularly in waters near China's shores. Growing CCP influence through MSRI investments in Europe, Africa, and South Asia threaten to open a second front of maritime competition for which the USG is apparently unprepared. A Stagnant CCP in 2049 will have as a baseline the ships, jets, and missiles still to be provided under current acquisition programs, though they may be degraded by poor maintenance and sustainment. Under those circumstances, the CCP would still possess the world's largest navy, coast guard, and maritime militia concentrated in a region covered by a robust threat envelope from ship- and shore-launched anti-ship missiles boasting the longest operational ranges in the world. The USG cannot be assured of military primacy in the Indo-Pacific even when facing a Stagnant CCP, and the still-shifting military balance will have deleterious effects on the credibility of U.S. security guarantees, stressing and potentially weakening U.S. ties in the Indo-Pacific security architecture.

CCP maritime transformation has already passed the point at which the PLA's capabilities seriously challenge U.S. primacy and so undermine U.S. credibility in the Indo-Pacific. That it reached such a point at all indicates the enduring competitive intentions of the CCP to accrue sea power and exert it in a maritime competition with the United States.

2. PRC economic growth determines the intensity of maritime transformation, but it is not the object of such.

The CCP's vital objectives are not fundamentally economic. While the CCP in years prior clearly stated that its focus was on economic development and that it considered national security a secondary factor, authoritative Party statements at the Fifth Plenum and the revised PRC National Security Law, both issued in 2020, have shown that the CCP has revised its

priorities and now coordinates development and security interest as equals. The elevation of the CCP's security interests in its decision-making calculus, particularly when presented and institutionalized in high-profile documents resulting from the CCP's consensus-building process, suggests that USG and allied countries are now less able to shape CCP security-driven decisions by imposing costs on the Chinese economy alone.

Maritime transformation is a political decision with security and economic components, and it is a decision the CCP made to advance toward national rejuvenation. Xi Jinping's description of it and its objective of transforming the PRC into a maritime great power have two implications. First, it is a pillar of the CCP's grand strategy reflecting a complex of interests beyond having the means to secure economic interests. Maritime transformation is about more than having a constabulary navy able to patrol SLOCs to secure seaborne trade. Second, the CCP will not reverse its commitment to maritime transformation merely because it is expensive or unprofitable. Cost imposition on the PRC economy will serve to limit the resources available to fund maritime transformation programs, potentially restricting their frequency and scale, but it will not force the CCP to cease or reverse its accrual of sea power.

3. Sea control in the Indo-Pacific is on track to become prohibitively costly.

The United States faces an enduring challenge to its sea control capabilities with no apparent answer. The PLA's ballistic and cruise missiles, which DoD considers to be more advanced than those fielded by the U.S. military, constitute a robust ability to contest or deny any foreign military attempts to gain and maintain sea control within its threat envelope.⁷⁸³ The PLA has been able to fire anti-ship missiles able to reach targets as far from China's shores as Guam since at least 2019 and is likely increasing its capacity of missiles and launchers while

⁷⁸³ U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020*, U.S. Department of Defense, September 1, 2020, ii, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

simultaneously testing still more advanced anti-ship missiles that range beyond Guam. The PLA's land-based sea denial will likely soon extend its coverage beyond the Asia-Pacific to cover larger swaths of the Indo-Pacific.⁷⁸⁴ In response, the USG will need to make significant investments in theater missile defense just to maintain the credible functionality of its forward operating bases in the event of war; recognizing this reality, former USINDOPACOM commander ADM Phil Davidson advocated for a \$4.68 billion missile defense system on Guam.⁷⁸⁵ The USG appears to have limited options beyond Guam for theater missile defense, as even Japan has declined to continue developing the Aegis Ashore missile defense system and has thus far declined to commit to the alternative Aegis Afloat.⁷⁸⁶

Without credible theater missile defense, U.S. sailors in the Indo-Pacific are forced to operate under threat of PLARF strikes. This does not preclude outright U.S. military forces or operations near China. However, U.S. military efforts to seize air and maritime superiority—prerequisites for permitting the conduct of maritime or air operations—will face highly sophisticated sea denial operations conducted by a PLA with sufficient accuracy, munitions, and electromagnetic support to contest or in some cases outright deny U.S. efforts.⁷⁸⁷ Sea control for operationally useful durations at acceptable cost within the First and Second Island Chains may soon be outside of the U.S. military's capability if it is not already. The U.S. military's response has been to explore land-based sea denial capabilities within the theater and standoff maritime strike capabilities outside the current threat envelope in apparent recognition of this

⁷⁸⁴ *China Arms*, "DF-26 deployed to Tibetan plateau to threaten Indian Navy and inland cities," February 18, 2021, <https://www.china-arms.com/2021/02/df26-threaten-india/>.

⁷⁸⁵ Mallory Shelbourne, "Davidson: Aegis Ashore on Guam Would 'Free Up' 3 Navy Destroyers," *USNI News*, March 4, 2021, <https://news.usni.org/2021/03/04/davidson-aegis-ashore-on-guam-would-free-up-3-navy-destroyers>.

⁷⁸⁶ *The Japan Times*, "Japan weighs Aegis Ashore alternatives, including megafloat or deployment aboard destroyer," June 22, 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/06/22/national/japan-aegis-ashore-alternatives-megafloat-destroyer/>; Mari Yamaguchi, "Japan confirms it's scrapping US missile defense system," *DefenseNews*, June 25, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2020/06/25/japan-confirms-its-scrapping-us-missile-defense-system/>.

⁷⁸⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, June 2020, 14 & 137, <https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf>.

reality.⁷⁸⁸ Future peacetime operations, such as presence operations designed to assure regional allies and partners of the combat-ready credibility of a U.S. security guarantee, will be reduced by the likely outcomes of escalation. Future wartime operations will likely need to include at least in part beyond the weapon engagement zone. While at least one flag officer has suggested for reasons not revealed that the PLA's anti-ship threat does not target U.S. assets that would be instrumental for victory in "the next war," this suggestion is countervailed by ADM Davidson's assessed need for a Guam Defense System and by the thin history of militaries that are deterred by secret plans.⁷⁸⁹

Even if the United States loses command of the seas in the Indo-Pacific, the PLA is unlikely to gain it. Despite its robust surface fleet modernization, the PLA still lacks a mature naval aviation capability critical for improving situational awareness at sea and for conducting antisubmarine warfare operations. Both are necessary to establish sea control against a peer adversary. What assets the PLA has successfully built are also likely to operate in the face of U.S. forces postured with precision strike capabilities that lend themselves to sea denial and may include strikes on PLA assets at sea or on the Chinese mainland. Most of all, the Indo-Pacific countries most familiar with Chinese military power are also the most disturbed by it. As such, the likely effect of the CCP's sea denial capabilities is sharply restricting prospects for any military to gain sea control for operationally useful durations in the Indo-Pacific, particularly within the First and Second Island Chains. The future Indo-Pacific security architecture and the

⁷⁸⁸ U.S. Marine Corps, *Force Design 2030*, March 2020, <https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Docs/CMC38%20Force%20Design%202030%20Report%20Phase%20I%20and%20II.pdf?ver=2020-03-26-121328-460>; David B. Larer, "The US Navy is moving to put more ship-killer missiles on submarines," *DefenseNews*, November 16, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2020/11/16/the-us-navy-is-moving-to-put-more-ship-killer-missiles-on-submarines/>; Mark Gunzinger, "Stand In, Standoff," *Air Force Magazine*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.airforcemag.com/article/stand-in-standoff/>.

⁷⁸⁹ Mallory Shelbourne, "U.S. Admiral: China Can 'Keep Pouring Money' Into Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles," *USNI News*, January 27, 2021, <https://news.usni.org/2021/01/27/u-s-admiral-china-can-keep-pouring-money-into-anti-ship-ballistic-missiles>. ADM Davidson remarked that between March 2021 and 2026, the PLA will likely achieve overmatch in the Indo-Pacific and be fully able to change the status quo in the region. Philip S. Davidson, (speech, at the American Enterprise Institute, March 4, 2021), <https://www.aei.org/events/a-conversation-with-us-indo-pacific-commands-adm-philip-davidson/>.

United States' individual security guarantees are likely to suffer severe losses if they are made credible by operations requiring sea control at acceptable costs.

4. The CCP's vision of sea power is one that is deeply integrated across domains and elements of national power, military and civilian.

The CCP's land-sea integrated approach to maritime transformation and the PLA's principle of "residing the military within the civilian" foster sea power that is integrated across land and maritime domains at the same time that it is integrated across informational, military, and economic elements of national power. The PLA's embrace of its fortress fleet and dedicated augmentation of its naval forces with shore-based fire gives the PLA a significant operational advantage over forward-deployed U.S. forces in the Indo-Pacific. However, while the bulk of the PLA's traditional military hardware has been oriented to China's east, civilian components of maritime transformation efforts run along informational and economic lines toward China's west. The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* describes continental China as the "support and backstop" from which power radiates to the "focal point" of the Indo-Pacific, with space and cyber forming the "crux."⁷⁹⁰ This description entails more than the strategic depth conferred by surface fleets and ballistic missiles. Financial power radiates from China along the MSRI and contributes to a complex information network stretching into waterways both east and west of China. Civilian assets are critical nodes in this network and make clear contributions to CCP maritime domain awareness and targeting capabilities.

In China's near seas, the PLA's operational picture is supported by surveillance equipment aboard civilian maritime militia vessels and the permanent maritime sensors constructed in the early stages of the Blue Ocean Information Network. In the waters beyond, ports that are

⁷⁹⁰ Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013), 246.

owned, operated, or have received significant funding from Chinese companies through the MSRI are positioned to become nodes in an information network feeding into the PLA's ISR networks; in times of crisis, these information nodes may extend further to include ports that are not owned or operated by Chinese companies but use the PRC Ministry of Transportation-sponsored LOGINK logistics management software. By 2035, the Blue Ocean Information Networks' sensors are also projected to have spread along the MSRI. The PRC's ocean reconnaissance and surveillance satellites, under the PLA's oversight, reinforce the CCP's maritime domain awareness in both the near seas and the far seas.

A broader common operating picture than that enjoyed by one's adversaries is an important advantage with applications in wartime and peacetime. Shared situational awareness can enable or hobble an organization as its component parts attempt to operate in concert, whether those operations be battlefield maneuver, surveillance of international waters, or enforcement of international maritime law. The USG's maritime challenge is not posed by the PLA alone; it is posed by the CCP and the state, military, and civilian society apparatuses it can manipulate.

5. The USG's focus on high-end threats takes a narrow view of the maritime competition's decisive terrain and does not adequately account for the peacetime implications of the CCP's military and paramilitary power.

The USG began competing against the CCP long after the CCP first began the competition. The USG first joined the contest by placing a disproportionate focus on high-end military threats. While CCP leaders designated the United States as their primary strategic adversary in 1993 and actively accelerated preparations for strategic competition in 1999, the USG was distracted by other engagements until years later. The Office of Net Assessment's 2001 Defense Strategy Review and 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review considered the need for enhancing military capability against the PLA, but U.S. foreign policy did not publicly recognize the CCP's revisionist ambitions or prescribe that the USG compete in response on a smaller scale until the

renewed publicization of the Freedom of Navigation program in 2015, and the USG did not do so on a larger scale until the 2017 National Security Strategy.

The USG's policy toward the PRC in 2015 and thereafter appear motivated by concerns about the Indo-Pacific military balance and positioning for the high-end fight; the timing of the 2015 FONOP appeared to indicate that the Obama Administration was concerned about Chinese militarization, not international law, in the South China Sea. While the Trump Administration's policy toward the PRC led with economic competition, the administration also adopted a more aggressive FONOP schedule and conducted several high-profile naval exercises in the South China Sea.⁷⁹¹ In the last days of the Trump Administration, Congress also established a \$2.2 billion Pacific Deterrence Initiative to strengthen deterrence against the CCP by modernizing U.S. forces in the theater, improving logistics and sustainment requirements, and building the partner defense capability and capacity.⁷⁹² These measures, centered on military capabilities, do not respond to threats to U.S. strategic influence posed by civilian assets or in the gray zone.

In the South China Sea, the USG's focus on the prospect of kinetic conflict between high-end systems has at times been out of step with what is needed to assure regional allies and partners. When the Obama Administration was faced with Chinese provocations at Scarborough Shoal in 2012, it declined to clarify its interpretation of the U.S.-Philippines alliance in support of its treaty ally and only appeared to take public action on the islet group by warning the CCP against building military facilities on Scarborough Shoal.⁷⁹³ When the Trump

⁷⁹¹ David B. Larter, "In challenging China's claims in the South China Sea, the US Navy is getting more assertive," *DefenseNews*, February 5, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2020/02/05/in-challenging-chinas-claims-in-the-south-china-sea-the-us-navy-is-getting-more-assertive/>; Sam LaGrone, "U.S., Chinese Navies Hold Dueling Exercises in the South China Sea," *USNI News*, July 6, 2020, <https://news.usni.org/2020/07/06/u-s-china-navies-hold-dueling-exercises-in-the-south-china-sea>.

⁷⁹² U.S. Congress, William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, H.R. 6395, December 2020, 1437-1438, <https://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20201207/CRPT-116hrpt617.pdf>.

⁷⁹³ Demetri Sevastopulo, Geoff Dyer, and Tom Mitchell, "Obama forced Xi to back down over South China Sea dispute," *Financial Times*, July 12, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/c63264a4-47f1-11e6-8d68-72e9211e86ab?siteedition=intl#axzz4JeHY7fh7>.

Administration observed a Malaysian drillship experiencing a harassment campaign from Chinese vessels, it conducted a sustained, high-end joint presence operation in support of an ungrateful partner that had accustomed to Chinese harassment and mercurial U.S. support.⁷⁹⁴ In both cases, the USG led its engagement with its Southeast Asian ally or partner with a focus on whether high-end military assets might be at risk or the solution, with consistently poor results. As Bill Hayton advised, “engagement means more than just showing up with a gunboat, or even an aircraft carrier, every few weeks or months and expecting everyone to love you.”⁷⁹⁵ Preparing for a high-end fight against the PLA may position the U.S. military to make its security guarantees more credible, but it alone is not enough to reassure allies and partners facing maritime coercion from the CCP.

The focus on high-end capabilities is also visible in the asymmetries between the USG and CCP on what constitutes the Indo-Pacific regions’ strategic geography. The decisive terrain from U.S. defense planning perspectives continues to be the First and Second Island Chains, where the PLA is able to hold U.S. forces at considerable risk. But the decisive terrain from a CCP maritime power perspective is the aggregate of maritime chokepoints both east and west of continental China, through which energy resources and hollowed-out Chinese capital flow. The USG’s response to the CCP’s maritime transformation has been piecemeal, with U.S. forward deployments and the Pacific Deterrence Initiative along the chokepoints to China’s east and a patchwork of economic initiatives, including the Clean Network and the Blue Dot Network, responding to the Belt and Road Initiative. By targeting the BRI writ large, these initiatives only address the investments along maritime chokepoints to China’s west by default.⁷⁹⁶ In the same

⁷⁹⁴ Euan Graham, “U.S. Naval Standoff With China Fails to Reassure Regional Allies,” *Foreign Policy*, May 4, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/04/malaysia-south-china-sea-us-navy-drillship-standoff/>.

⁷⁹⁵ Bill Hayton, oral testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on *U.S.-China Relations in 2020: Enduring Problems and Emerging Challenges*, September 9, 2020, 152, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/September_9_2020_Hearing_Transcript.pdf.

⁷⁹⁶ U.S. Department of State, “Blue Dot Network,” <https://www.state.gov/blue-dot-network/>; U.S. Department of State, “The Clean Network,” 2017-2021 archived content, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/the-clean-network/index.html>.

way that the USG may not have been actively competing against the CCP for before 2017, it is not clear that the USG is directly competing against the CCP's instruments for accruing and exerting sea power in the Indian Ocean Region or Mediterranean Sea today.

6. Converting power into strategic influence remains a weakness for the CCP.

Just as eroding U.S. sea control capabilities in the Indo-Pacific are not giving way to new PLA sea control capabilities, the CCP's use of sea power to erode U.S. strategic influence in Southeast Asia has not given rise to CCP strategic influence over Southeast Asian countries. Exactly what effect CCP sea power has on the PRC's foreign relationships is difficult to separate from other potential variables, such as blame for the COVID-19 pandemic or ongoing genocide in Xinjiang. What can be known is that efforts DoD describes the PRC as having likely made to establish military bases in Namibia, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands have thus far been unsuccessful.⁷⁹⁷ Nor has the PRC announced any new maritime access agreements to support expeditionary operations for its blue-water navy, with the potential exception of the naval base at Ream, Cambodia.⁷⁹⁸

Some investments along the MSRI have met resistance or limited host country support. In Malaysia, officials across several governments were eager to cooperate with the CCP to fund an expansion of the Kuantan Port, which sits on Malaysia's east coast and is the Malaysian port closest to China. Despite support from local officials, Malaysian officials at the federal level did not support a similar investment into the Melaka Deepwater Port, which sits in the Malacca

⁷⁹⁷ U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2020*, U.S. Department of Defense, September 1, 2020, 129, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>

⁷⁹⁸ Shaun Turton and Mech Dara, "Cambodia naval base set to undergo China-led expansion," *Nikkei Asia*, October 3, 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Cambodia-naval-base-set-to-undergo-China-led-expansion>.

Strait and received significant public scrutiny for the strategic implications of positioning a Chinese port in the region's energy lifeline.⁷⁹⁹

Other public indicators describe the CCP as facing significant challenges in accruing or exerting strategic influence. The 2021 ISEAS poll reports over 75% of respondents named the PRC as the most economically influential power, and nearly 50% of respondents named the PRC as the most strategic-politically influential power in Southeast Asia; in both cases, the vast supermajority of respondents also reported this influence as worrying rather than welcome.⁸⁰⁰ The Lowy Institute's Asia Power Index assesses that the PRC exerts only modest power in the Indo-Pacific through military diplomacy, and its metrics suggest that the PRC's ability to advance its diplomatic interests appears to underperform its significant investments in diplomatic networking and regional summits.⁸⁰¹ The CCP is not without strategic influence, but it consistently fails to fully convert its economic, diplomatic, and military power into strategic influence. This weakness may be preventing the CCP from establishing foreign military bases, investing in strategic strongpoints, or building soft power. There is no reason to believe the CCP's efforts to convert sea power into strategic influence will be different.

7. The PLAGF's continentalism remains an enduring vulnerability for CCP sea power.

Continentalist interests, including the PLAGF, contributed to a successful CCP effort to pursue land-sea integrated sea power rather than outright Mahanian sea power. Although this fostered distinct inter-domain operational advantages for the PLA's prospective operations

⁷⁹⁹ Francis E. Hutchinson and Tham Siew Yean, "Tale of two Belt and Road Initiative port projects in Malaysia shows limits of Chinese money," *South China Morning Post*, December 7, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/3112665/tale-two-belt-and-road-initiative-port-projects-malaysia-shows>; Sebastian Strangio, "In Malaysia, a Gargantuan Chinese-Backed Development Bites the Dust," *The Diplomat*, November 19, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/in-malaysia-a-gargantuan-chinese-backed-development-bites-the-dust/>.

⁸⁰⁰ ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute ASEAN Studies Centre, "The State of Southeast Asia: 2020 Survey Report," January 16, 2020, 2, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/TheStateofSEASurveyReport_2020.pdf.

⁸⁰¹ *Lowy Institute*, Lowy Institute Asia Power Index 2020 Edition, <https://power.lowyinstitute.org/>.

against a forward-based adversary, the PLAGF's obstinate pursuit of its interests, backed by its sizeable bureaucratic heft, constitutes an enduring vulnerability for CCP maritime transformation and for the future of CCP sea power. The PLAGF competes against the PLAN for resources and leadership roles in joint command structures. This is typical of professional militaries. Less typical is the PLAGF's determined, decades-long resistance against the orders of successive CCP General Secretaries to modernize into a smaller, better-trained ground component of a joint force.

The ground force's failures of reform and modernization hold at risk PLAN modernization in two ways. First, the PLAN will not be able to complete its own reforms into the naval arm of a joint force if it cannot rely on the PLAGF to be responsive to its reform obligations. Second, halting PLAGF modernization weakens the PLA's defense posture in the theaters nearest to its own borders, increasing the tension between a PLAN aspiring to blue-water operations and a PLAGF that may not be able to secure CCP interests. In critical cases such as Taiwan, the PLAN may be required to supplement PLAGF deficiencies at cost to its budget, manpower, and mission set.

This is a vulnerability, not simply a weakness. Borrowing Toshi Yoshihara and Jack Bianchi's definition, a weakness is an impediment to an entity's ability to reach its goals, while a vulnerability is a weakness that can be subjected to an adversary's strategy.⁸⁰² The CCP's weakness in converting power into strategic influence is in part driven by its sweeping demands, hostile behavior, and resistance to compromise. The USG is unable to reliably increase that effect. However, the USG can increase tension within continentalist and sea power factions within the CCP, for example by, unilaterally or with allies, adopting a force posture that tests the CCP's interest in militarily dominating Taiwan or a force posture that confers greater threats

⁸⁰² Toshi Yoshihara and Jack Bianchi, "Seizing on Weakness: Allied Strategy for Competing with China's Globalizing Military," *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*, 2021, 9-20, [https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA8239_\(Seizing_on_Weakness_Report\)_Web.pdf](https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA8239_(Seizing_on_Weakness_Report)_Web.pdf).

near China's disputed land borders. In such cases, the guiding principle for taking advantage of the PLAGF as a vulnerability for CCP sea power is to lure it into making the mistakes that, because of its robust bureaucratic interests, it cannot help but make.

Conclusion

CCP grand strategy has undergone a sweeping reorientation toward the sea. Driven by an apparent faith that sea power will lead to or evidence national rejuvenation, CCP leaders have cultivated and exerted sea power, in part to erode U.S. strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific's maritime theater. The strategic logic of CCP maritime transformation has also become clear over time and various iterations; the CCP's sea power can directly stress U.S. security guarantees by cutting into its margin of military superiority, test the USG's ability to assure its allies and partners through gray zone coercions, and shape the regional security environment with civilian investments hollowed out to conceal military purposes. Maritime transformation has not made the CCP a dominant power commanding the alliance of most Indo-Pacific countries, but it has posed significant challenges to the United States' ability to sustain such a position.

Because it is the leading power, strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific remains the United States' to lose. The rise of PLA sea denial in China's near seas has compromised the U.S. military's ability to establish sea control, and potentially command of the commons altogether, within the First and Second Island Chains. While U.S. defense planners remain focused on the eastern half of the Indo-Pacific, commercial investments along the MSRI and the PLA's doctrine making military use of civilian assets extend gradients of PLA power through the Indian Ocean Region and Mediterranean Sea under cover of economic interests and win-win cooperation.

The United States faces a daunting challenge in the CCP as a sea power. CCP leaders are committed to supplanting U.S. influence and have prepared for decades to do so, in part by producing the world's largest navy, coast guard, and maritime militia under the protective

umbrella of the world's first anti-ship ballistic missiles. CCP leaders have also publicly indicated that their security interests are no longer secondary to their economic interests, blunting the USG's potential for constraining the CCP's military expansion by holding its economy at risk. Countries in the Indo-Pacific have repeatedly declined to bandwagon into an anti-CCP coalition, instead choosing to hedge between great powers in competition. As these countries continue to hedge, the United States bleeds strategic influence over its allies and partners.

How the PRC's economy develops will have significant impact on the future of CCP sea power, but barring total Party-state implosion, the capabilities that the CCP has already built will impede the USG's pursuit of its foreign policy objectives in the Indo-Pacific for decades to come. The USG faces moderate to extreme threats from the CCP and its sea power in every future. Trends favor the CCP, and USG platitudes to work more closely with allies and partners will not arrest them.

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